

IRISH LITERATURE AND DRAMA

IRISH LITERATURE AND DRAMA  
IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE:  
A SHORT HISTORY

*by*  
STEPHEN GWYNN



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TO  
HILDA NOLAN

whose kind wit and gay hospitality  
have enriched the life of Dublin for  
Irish literary folk, among whom this  
writer claims only to be the most  
grateful

## PREFACE

THIS book sketches a movement which, at first scarcely conscious, began almost a century ago to be deliberately directed and forwarded. Its aim was to give Ireland a literature of her own in the language whose use was rapidly superseding that of Gaelic. The movement has so far succeeded that its growth is a fact of Irish history, and cannot be understood without reference to the political development of the country. I have therefore tried to make this connection clear throughout. Further, it has not been compatible with the scope and purpose of this book to go into full detailed study of any author's work, but merely to show how, and in what measure, each affected the movement and was affected by it. There is no attempt to give an exhaustive list of all the authors, still less a reasoned account of all the work, that may be claimed for Irish literature. Selection of what was most significant has been necessary. For fuller detail, I refer readers to the *History of Irish Literature* by Aodh de Blacain.

In one particular field, that of journalism, where Irish talent has conspicuously displayed itself, I have felt obliged to omit all but those journalists whose influence was potent in Irish literature, and a long list of able Irish writers from Maginn to T. P. O'Connor find no mention here.

The output of this century, since the movement gained strength, has been so much more profuse and varied that I have had to limit myself to a very summary indication, and in all that has been produced by writers who became prominent since the political revolution of 1916-1923, lines of development, and relations of one author to another,

do not yet stand out clear. It is here that I am most conscious of omissions. Much has been left without mention of which I would gladly have written, for instance, cases of transmitted talent, such as that of Miss Pamela Hinkson, Katharine Tynan's daughter, who inherits all her mother's charm of style and sense of beauty, or that of the writer known to readers as M. J. Farrell, who is a daughter of another poetess, Moira O'Neill. Fifty years ago no Irish novelist could show such accomplishment as theirs, to-day it does not of itself suffice to render them remarkable except for a promise of what may come.

In regard to the Irish drama, I confess my inability to judge of a play unless I have seen it acted, and there are several dramatists—notably Mr. Brinsley Macnamara—whose work I have not had this opportunity to judge. I can only hope to have given an outline of this branch of Ireland's activity which may at least convey what it has signified to me.

One thing, however, I claim—it is the thing which will give this book whatever value it possesses. For the past fifty years I have watched the movement closely, I have known most of the leading persons concerned, and whenever and however I could, I have tried to help.

S. G.

*March, 1936.*

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# IRISH LITERATURE AND DRAMA IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## CHAPTER I

### THE BACKGROUND OF THE IRISH MIND

THE literature of which I am to write lends itself to treatment in moderate space, for it is the product of a brief period. Five generations cover it, from Moore's *Melodies* down to O'Casey's *Junio and the Paycock* or whatever else one takes as characteristic of Ireland since a revolution established the Free State. In a sense therefore it is comparable to the literature of Canada or of Australia, and yet the comparison could not be seriously put forward. A national literature takes some time to develop, and though Canada has the germs of one, the literature that began there to spring out of the very heart of the people was in French. We come closer to reality when we compare the Irish literature and the Scottish. I do not think it will be disputed that the output of Ireland in prose and verse within the past fifty years is to-day comparable to that of Scotland for the same period. But up till 1900 no one with reputation to lose would have ventured to say this. The whole position has been altered out of knowledge by the work of men who are either still living or only recently dead. It has been altered since Ireland came back in some measure to her own possessions, and was nourished



at fountains from which she had allowed herself to be cut off

The reason why Irish literature cannot be compared with Canadian and Australian is that the Irishman has behind him a long succession of work, each stage of it growing out of the other, and all having the imprint of the Irish mind. Literature, the written word, is only part of that creation, yet for a people not entirely commanding its own destinies the most important, because the freest and most accessible to all. Now, for at least a hundred years, and some would be more inclined to say two hundred, the Irish mind was cut off from its own literature. The reason why Scottish literature, the literature of Scotland in Scots or in English, offers so much a richer field of study than that to which I am addressed is that Scots have been writing in Scots for as long as Englishmen in English. Dunbar is Chaucer's contemporary. The seedbed from which Burns and Sir Walter sprang was five hundred years in preparing. Every Scot has been and is to-day affected by influences that emanate from all that long-gathered store.

Yet this Scottish language was at most only a sister shoot from the same stem as English. whoever understood the one, understood the other, and in that sense Scottish national literature is a part of English, it brings in no alien element. In Ireland the case is very different. The special interest in the literature of which I have to write is that it links up the intimate expression of an Ireland which has become English-speaking, which for a century at least has thought in English, to a poetry and a mythology that took literary shape centuries before English was a written or a spoken speech. Gaelic is one of the oldest European languages. Scholars may decide whether its living forms differ more or less from the earliest examples known to us than Italian from Latin, or modern Greek from that of

Pericles, but there is no question of its continuous descent. The Gaelic conquest of Ireland is dated about five centuries before the Christian era, and it seems that before Patrick in the fifth century A D, brought Ireland into the Christian community, Gaelic had entirely replaced the earlier language or languages. On the other hand, modern scholarship tends to believe that in the epic cycles which have come down to us through Gaelic there is a very large element of Pictish legend and tradition—traces of something even more remote from Mediterranean culture than the mind of the Celtic Gael.

However that may be, the Gael assimilated it, he made it his own, it was wrought into a learned poetry. All that we know of the pre-Christian Celts tells us that when Mediterranean Europe—the Europe of Greece and Rome—was able to take cognisance of their manners and institutions, they were found to maintain in special honour a class of professional poets. All that we know of Christian Gaelic Ireland tells us that down to the final break-up of the Gaelic order at the beginning of the seventeenth century, this institution lasted.

It is true that from the introduction of Christianity onward Ireland had knowledge of Latin—two or three centuries later, knowledge of Latin and probably of Greek, was better established in Ireland than in any European country north of the Alps and the Pyrenees. To that extent Irish culture had become “European.” But Ireland, unlike any other European country except Scandinavia, had never been subjugated by Rome, it had never come under Roman law, its own learned profession of law, closely connected with the profession of literature, was steadily preserved, and its traditions moulded the Irish custom into shapes quite other than the Roman—with consequences that last to this day. But from the purely literary standpoint it is more important to note that Irish

poets through all these centuries, at least down to the Norman Conquest, were busy transmitting and reissuing the imaginative product of pre-Christian Ireland. The background of their fancy was furnished not by the classic mythology, but by tales of their own gods and heroes—a fabric neither shaped nor coloured by any influence from Greece or Rome.

That, I think, is why Professor Corkery, the writer who to my mind has written with most insight about Gaelic literature, says that nothing else in Europe is so un-European. Nothing else, I had rather say, is so little Greek, so little Roman.

There are, however, the Scandinavian and Teutonic literatures which also had their origin outside the sphere of *Roman culture*; and certainly all that poetry is much less strange and difficult to any mind of English formation than the Irish—perhaps to any “European” mind. But the England which Rome ruled was a British England, of Celtic race. Teutons swept over it when Rome withdrew, and the land was occupied and held in the main by a Nordic folk. When these new-comers—Angles, Saxons, Danes, and Norsemen—came over and settled, they brought with them their old songs, they made new ones; but they brought them to a country which was part of Europe because it had been part of Rome. Rome’s imprint remained, and revived with the spread of Christianity.

The Scandinavians reached Ireland, and they brought to Ireland one element of culture—the stable life of fortified towns. But beyond the seaports or districts immediately surrounding them, there was no Scandinavian settlement. Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, and Cork must have been, at least in part, Norse-speaking, down to the time of the Norman conquest; the rest of Ireland remained Gaelic. In the matter of culture, the Danes destroyed much in Ireland, they brought none. No trace of Danish influence is to be

found in the Irish literature, probably because its traditional mould was too rigidly developed. The canons of Gaelic poetry were guarded with a jealous academic professionalism—by which the literature lost much. The case of Scotland is instructive. In so far as it is Gaelic, Scotland is an Irish colony. The conquest began from the Antrim shore across the narrow sea, undertaken by a branch of the family which ruled in the northern half of Ireland. It spread gradually and in the sixth century the Irish ruler gave his kinsman St. Columba the island of Iona from which to undertake a more peaceful conquest of the Picts. But nothing could better illustrate the unity of the two lands than this—that when a general protest rose in Ireland against the exactions of the order of professional bards, Columba came over to defend their cause at the assembly in Tara, and a decree for extinction of the order was avoided.

Wherever the Gaelic state existed, it had its poets all disciplined by an elaborate course of training. Latin and Greek learning, and the knowledge that was transmitted through Latin and Greek, were maintained by the Christian clergy, but native Irish literature was an official profession in the Gaelic order. Where there was a Gaelic ruler, there was a Gaelic poet attached to him, part of whose business perhaps the chief part, was to celebrate events and actions. But always it was part of the poet's duty to know and recite the old poetry, Ireland's equivalent for the Homeric poems.

When Norman feudal rule superseded the Gaelic in Ireland or in Scotland the poet's function was no longer an obligatory part of the public life. The poet remained, but remained as a retainer of the earl or baron, and that part of his function which was to celebrate the honour of his lord and his lord's house by new poems grew more important than the other, which was to transmit the old

Yet the old poetry survived in the memory of the race, sometimes only in knowledge of its outlines, sometimes in actual and faithful reproduction, verse by verse. To this day, where Ireland is Gaelic-speaking, peasants can be found who will recite long poems in an Irish as archaic as Chaucer's English. The same was true of Gaelic Scotland, at least in the eighteenth century; and it was through Gaelic Scotland that modern England and modern Europe first became dimly aware of this storehouse of literary tradition. Macpherson's *Ossian* was an attempt to tell in English some of the stories on which Gaelic imagination had been fed since they were first shaped in Gaelic many centuries earlier. It was a sophisticated version of the original, just as Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* were a sophisticated version of the Arthurian legends. But it struck the mind of Europe with a strangeness quite other than that of the Arthurian legends, which originated in days of chivalry, that international institution of Christian Europe. These Gaelic sagas were voices from a world incomparably more remote. When they were heard in an Ireland whose educated classes already thought in English, they seemed as strange as in France or Italy. There was no man to whom they came with a more barbaric dissonance than to Oliver Goldsmith, born and bred in Ireland, in contact with Irish speakers. Ireland, in so far as it was English-speaking, had by Goldsmith's day lost all contact with the national literature of Ireland.

The same was true of Scotland, so far as Scotland's national literature was in Gaelic. But from the fourteenth century onward at least, Scotland had possessed truly national poets writing in the tongue of the Scottish lowlands: and song and ballad in that tongue had sprung up over all this country. For this Ireland had no equivalent. Broadly speaking, till the eighteenth century, whoever wrote English in Ireland wrote in the spirit of an enemy to the

Irish From the eighteenth century onward, voices were raised in English on behalf of Ireland, but to the men who uttered them all that was written in the national language was as though it did not exist. Irish history these men knew only from English historians and pamphleteers. Irish poetry was a sealed book to them. A few more, students by nature, studied the language, and had some guess at what there might be to learn through it, but if they knew anything of the literature, it was what was still being written by strange successors of the old arrogant poets. These were Bohemians of the peasant world, most of them hedge schoolmasters, clever and drunken, who wrote songs for their patrons, often for landlords of English name and race, who preserved the tradition of savage satire and were constantly at odds both with the law and with the Church. Yet what they wrote was live stuff, national literature, some of it comparable to the Scottish peasant poetry—and who could put it higher.

Learned men of native Irish stock there were who wrote in the seventeenth and eighteenth century on Irish subjects, but they wrote in Latin or in French. They had no place in the English-speaking world.

In short, in the eighteenth century nobody using English sought to explore Ireland's intellectual inheritance. Those who spoke Irish, who still were heirs of the past, who still were adding to the inheritance were people of no account. It was only after the nineteenth century had opened that men began to conceive the possibility of creating a new Irish literature through the English tongue. What first began to be written in Ireland, and on behalf of Ireland, in the English tongue, cannot properly be called Irish literature. Spenser, writing in Elizabeth's reign to urge a general policy of extermination as the best way to deal with the Irish race, had nevertheless far more sense of the historic Ireland than is to be found in Swift. Spenser

was aware of an Irish literary inheritance, of an Irish art, both in poetry and music, which he could appreciate ; for in the Ireland of his day the Gaelic order was not blotted out. To Swift, the native Irish were simply a helotry, so completely reduced to bondage that in spite of their numbers they could safely be ignored. Those Irish for whom he wrote were the conquerors, the possessors, subjects of the king of England, entitled to the same rights as other Englishmen, yet denied many of those rights because they lived in Ireland. He wrote for a colony, but a colony which had in theory the right of self-government, and he taught the colonists for the first time to think themselves a nation. The rights which were denied them were of course also denied to the native Irish, and in fighting their own cause they fought also to some extent that of the disfranchised and disqualified. For though all the professions were closed, trade was open to the Catholics, and in the main the freedom for which Swift and others contended was freedom of trade. In the *Drapier Letters*, the whole pith of the incitement to organized protest was that a debased currency would injure every man in Ireland, from the magnate who must have carts to carry up his rents, paid in base metal, down to the carter who wanted a glass of ale, and found his twopence would not buy one.

It is essential to get Swift properly placed in this survey, for, in one sense, he is at the beginning of Irish national literature in English, indeed, he is the beginning. But in a deeper sense he is no more part of it than the match is part of the gunpowder.

Both Swift's parents were of pure English stock ; they lived in Ireland for only a few years, through all his life Swift resented whatever forces or chances kept him in Ireland, and out of England, where, to his thinking at least, all the most significant years of his life were spent. He was a great imaginative writer, and the book by which

he is famous throughout all the European world, though conceived and written in Ireland, is inspired in the main by his English experiences, when he lived with the rulers of England and knew the English Court. If Ireland afforded anything to stimulate his thought, it was the spectacle of humanity reduced to the last degree of impoverished degradation. What pity he had for the native Irish was pity for most miserable human beings. They had pity for themselves, but it was not the same pity. To him they were maltreated serfs; to themselves they were the heirs of a noble race, despoiled, defeated, and held in ignominious bondage, yet aware of a nobility that survived in them.

Stopford Brooke, in the preface to a *Treasury of Irish Poetry* which he and T. W. Rolleston compiled at the close of the last century, says that all the poetry from which they chose concerned itself with three main themes—nationality, religion, and revolt. In the time when Swift wrote nothing was being made from which these anthologists could gather, there were no songs in English. But Gaelic Ireland had still scores of peasants making songs in Irish, and making them in a cultured tradition. In their songs nationality, religion, and the spirit of revolt are to be found everywhere.

For Swift, Irish nationality meant nothing, Ireland's claims to a historic and distinguished past only roused his contempt. The religion of the Catholic Irish was in his eyes nothing but a debased superstition. But he preached revolt, and, unlike the native writers, he preached it effectively. He taught the technique of revolt to a disarmed people; the lesson was caught up effectively, by Catholics as well as by Protestants. Ireland learnt that the written word in English might be a weapon. It could incite and animate the disarmed to combination. For a century and a half from Swift's day, nearly all the literature that came out of nationalist Ireland was forged as a weapon for combat.



Professor Corkery—to whom this book will owe more than is explicitly acknowledged—has written that Swift meant very little to the real Ireland of his day. The Gaelic song-makers, who say much about the life of their countryside, say nothing about the Dean or the Drapier. Yet it is indisputable that all Dublin knew about the Drapier, for the English Government was placarding the offer of a large reward to whomever would disclose the authorship of these pamphlets. The printer, who could not be hidden, was sent to jail: the secret of the authorship was everybody's secret, and nobody would give it to the Government for a thousand pounds. These characters stamped Swift's work as national, at least for the people of Dublin, and Professor Corkery himself has emphasised that although Gaelic Ireland was by then a nation of peasants, only to be found unmixed in the remote unfertile countrysides, still the Gaelic race and Gaelic speech were to be found everywhere, even in the cities—even in "Dublin of the English speech," Baile atha Cliath na bearna. Indeed the Drapier was celebrated in Cork, Waterford, and Limerick hardly less than in the capital, and, as Professor Corkery tells us, some of the most noted Gaelic poets were living for long periods in these towns. They cannot have been unaware of Swift and of his writings; nor can they have avoided feeling themselves part of an Ireland which included Catholic and Protestant, Gael and Gall, in one conception as Irish.

The Dublin which Swift's writings and his letters show us was a city where well-to-do houses, inhabited by people of pleasant culture, were surrounded by a vast bog of poverty, in which, assuredly, Protestant and Catholic were jumbled together. I see no reason to believe that the old applewomen and bootlace-sellers, on whom Swift surreptitiously bestowed the sixpences that he had saved by some curmudgeonly parade of economy, were all members

of his congregation The Liberties of St Patrick, in which he ruled, partly *de jure* as a magistrate and much more *de facto* by his formidable personality, were, fifty years later, full of rebels, and the rebels had Gaelic names, whatever tongue they spoke In short, Dublin of Swift's time was as Irish as the Dublin of Mr O'Casey's plays, where Protestant poor and Catholic poor live together in one squalid tenement house

To this Irish population Swift gave in his scattered verses one form of literature that had always much vogue in a country where the dread of ridicule was matched with a love of satire One of the prides of Gaelic poets was that they could raise blisters on a man's face with their stinging verses Swift could do that as well as any Gael of them all, and satire was being written in English all over Ireland from his day on

But it was never in his power, it was not in his nature, to make a song that would "rise the heart" in a man or in a people, and that, after all, is the true mark of a national literature Ireland did not get that from a writer in English till the eighteenth century was ended, but when Moore's Melodies came, they meant to Ireland for two generations as much as Burns's lyrics meant to Scotland They are the real beginning

Two possessions of the historic Ireland had been transmitted, however imperfectly, from the past Whatever had to do with material splendour, finely wrought ornament of silver and gold architecture with its rich adornment, was broken, lost, or carried away, though here and there something like the Cross of Cong was preserved in a remote parish More often, like the Ardagh Chalice, it was buried and awaiting chance discovery Scarcely one adorned building stood intact St Nicholas' Church in Galway, St Mary's in Youghal, are among the rare exceptions, and even so, what survived was now cut off from the worship

of the native Irish. But the two arts whose real structure resided in the minds of men, though written symbols preserved them, transmitted their inheritance. Music and poetry came down, and music spoke the language of all the world. It was intelligible to the son of a Dublin shopkeeper, even though the whole literary culture of Ireland might have receded from the consciousness of him and of his family.

It must have been through music that Moore contrived to get into intimate touch with the national spirit. Though he was a writer, writing in English and accepted by the English-speaking world for the grace and gaiety of his verse, yet he was a writer whom the sense of Ireland's historic past moved to veneration. When he wrote with emotion of "The harp that once through Tara's halls the soul of music shed," he touched a range of chords to which Swift certainly, Flood probably, and perhaps even Grattan was insensible, but they woke response through the whole of that peasant Ireland which preserved a sense of the Gaelic past and in some measure knew its history and its literature.

It would have been an ignorant peasant in Cork or Kerry, Connemara or Donegal who did not know more of that history and that literature than was known to Thomas Moore. In a long life as an Irish writer he did not get far beyond learning that there was much to be learnt. But he had instinctively the Irish attitude, not the English, to the spiritual inheritance of Ireland. Tara was to him at least a symbol. Yet one may doubt if he knew so much of Tara's literary associations as linked them with Ossian and Finn MacCool, Diarmid and Gráma. We can be sure that the earlier cycle of the Red Branch with its group of Ulster heroes and their enemies from Connacht lay wholly outside his ken. Yet these were to the Irish mind what the Homeric poems were to the Greek; and it is necessary here to indicate very briefly their nature.

## CHAPTER II

### THE IRISH NATIONAL LITERATURE

PERHAPS the most remarkable fact in relation to native Irish literature is the continuous care with which it was cherished and supported by the Gaelic people. They have had, and they have, an almost exaggerated sense of the importance of the past. The poet to them was not so much a maker as a recorder—not a deviser of stories, but one who could put new life through skilful words into actions that passed long ago. Literature maintained the national life, and for that reason the rulers of the community maintained those who preserved the literature, or who added to it by poems praising some new feat, or satirizing something which the Irish were taught to despise.

Transmission was by memory, and even after the art of writing was widely known and used throughout Ireland, the fully trained poet, who had reached the highest degree in his order, was bound to have by heart three hundred and fifty of the sagas. Patrick, when he came on his mission to Ireland, found the poets established in full power, and it was part of his wisdom that he made friends with them. Christianity could never have spread as it did in Ireland had the Irish been asked to discard the records of their pagan past. Druidism and the pagan worship connected with it disappeared, but even while centres of Christian learning and study were springing up all over Ireland with such vigour that they soon had importance for all northern Europe, the old schools of the poets continued, the poet

was still an officer at every ruler's court, and neither abbot nor bishop discouraged the preservation of the old native literature, pagan though it was. On the contrary, Columba, the greatest of the Irish-born saints, was himself a poet, attended for a period one of the poetic schools, and when the privileges of the literary order were threatened, intervened, as has been already said, to protect them.

The literature which Christian Ireland of the fifth century inherited had taken shape during several hundred years ; but a great part of it concerned events not more than two or three centuries distant.

these names meant but Goldsmith certainly would not have known, nor more than one in a thousand among the educated gentry of that day. Yet every peasant knew—and knew also that from the line traced back from Eber came the Munster kings. Indeed in the seventeenth century, half the Irish poets were busy with a "Contention of the Bards," in which some praised the northern Eremonian line of O'Neill and O'Donnell, and decried Eber's descendants, while the others took the other side. But all Ireland was interested in the legendary beginnings of its princely races.

The Gaels, too, knew the legendary story of invasions, and of contests between the Fomorians, pirates from overseas, and the Tuatha de Danaan, folk of the gods. They knew that the Milesians, whom we may take to be the first of the Gaels, chased before them to the uttermost corners of the island a smaller, meaner race, the Firbolg—and to this day in the western islands certain families are shown and marked out as of Firbolg stock. Such consciousness of the past was kept by the national literature far more actively alive than was in England the story of Alfred and his resistance to the Danes. There could be no national literature of Ireland which had not behind it some inkling of these legends, and those who wrote of Ireland in English during the eighteenth century were unreached by any such lore.

In short, access to all this legendary background was necessary to any one who was to enter into the mind of the Irish race and understand the later epic literature which is the expression of that mind. But this first mythology lacks human interest; it lacks the real life of poetry, which we find abundantly in the two groups which concern themselves with the deeds and feelings of human beings. These are the romances or sagas which fall into two distinct cycles dealing with Irish princes and warriors, of two clearly marked periods.

The earlier of them centres round the court of Conachar MacNessa, King of Ulster, and the centre of the power with which he is continually at war lies in Connacht. The age which it recalls is like that of the Homeric poems, an age of chariot fighters, using weapons of bronze. In it, neither Ulster nor Connacht is limited to the present boundaries, Ulster stretches to the Boyne; Maeve, the fierce Queen of Connacht, has her court at Cruachan in the rich lands of Roscommon; but how far her power extended north, south, or east we do not know. When she undertakes the great raid into Ulster, which is a glorified cattle foray, there are Leinster men in her host; Munster, however, does not come into the story at all.

It is in the course of this war that we have the fullest account of Ulster's special glory, Cuchulain, the Achilles of this group of sagas, which are the work of unknown poets, rehandled no doubt by generation after generation, but never compacted by one brain into a whole. It is properly the poetry of a race, or of the professional order of poets entertained by a race which from the first loved literature. And beyond doubt those who listened to recitation of the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*, the Foray for the Bull of Cooley, knew the other sagas which led up to this one.

For there are sagas which tell how Conachar MacNessa came to be King of Ulster, by the guile of his mother Nessa, who, after the death of Conachar's father married Fergus MacRoy, strongest of all the fighting men, but good-natured and easily persuaded out of his right. There is another saga or romance—and the one of them all which has most powerfully affected modern imagination—which tells of the child Deirdre, predestined to bring trouble, whom Conachar set apart and reared for himself, but who fled from the grey tang with the young champion Naoise. Naoise with his brothers carried her safely to Scotland, where they lived in idyllic happiness till Conachar persuaded

Fergus to cross the narrow sea and bring them back under his own pledge of protection, then having tricked Fergus away from his guard, the king, breaking his own pledge, slew the three sons of Usnach treacherously in a house of his court at Emain Macha, beside Armagh. It was in anger at this betrayal that Fergus left Conachar, and went into Connacht to be Maeve's lover and ally, a strength to her army when it went out against Ulster in Ulster's hour of weakness.

There is again another saga which tells of the curse which brought this weakness on the men of Ulster, so that at certain periods they were like women in the pains of childbirth, all the men of Ulster, that is, who were grown warriors when a woman heavy with child was forced to run against the King's horses. All hearers of the Tain would know that story, and know also why Cuchulain, the young champion, whose fortress was by Dundalk, watching the plain that led from there to the Boyne frontier, was exempt from the curse.

For there were other sagas which told of this hero's birth, through which he was, like Achilles, half divine, though a man, and, like Achilles, able to get protection in his need from the immortals. Gods and mortals, and creatures neither god nor mortal, not to be killed, yet vulnerable, meet in the story which tells how Cuchulain with his single chariot held back the Connacht host. It is a story of marvels, the Gaelic imagination could not be content with ordinary human deeds, yet nothing could be more human than that episode of the saga which tells how Cuchulain's chosen comrade was sent out to fight against him for the passage of the ford at Ardee. The two had been trained together at the school of a warrior woman in Skye, they were sworn always to avoid each other in battle, but Maeve wrought on Ferdiadh with the taunts that no Gael could withstand, and so began the three-day fight.



On the evening of the first day the champions stabled their horses together, shared their food and the healing herbs for the wounds they had given each other ; on the second, they desisted with courtesy and kindness, but they slept apart that night ; and on the third day Cuchulain used the enchanted weapon that till then he had held back , but as Ferdiadh lay bleeding, his friend carried him across the ford to die, that it might not be said he had failed to win the passage.

Cuchulain's loves have their own sagas, and, lastly, there is the story of Cuchulain's death, brought about by enchantment and the evil power of demons, which sends out the champion to fight against the waves of the sea. There is also (perhaps a later addition) the moving episode of Cuchulain's fight with the young unknown warrior who subdued all the heroes of Ulster till at last Cuchulain was called, and slew his own son - child of the warrior woman of Skye whom Cuchulain had loved and left, and who taught this child of theirs the parry for all strokes except the one by which she knew that his father would kill him. She had put the boy under *geasa*, that is, bonds of honour, not to reveal his name to any ; so that in the fight, the son knew his father but the father did not know his son.

*Geasa* make a perpetually recurring element in determining action, and, above all else, give these romances that un-European tang which Professor Corkery recognizes. A Maori or a South Sea islander, accustomed to the incidence of *tabu*, would understand more easily why a man is deterred from taking what seems the natural human course. Thus Conachar, wishing to get Fergus out of the way when the sons of Usnach are to be murdered, persuades a man to meet him at the landing-place and offer him a feast that night. For it is *geasa* with Fergus never to refuse a feast ; and though Deirdre, who can foresee the future like

Cassandra, and like Cassandra can never avert what she foresees, reproaches him for deserting them, he goes, willingly, lest it should be said that he broke his *tabu*

All these romances are romances of men and women, strongly drawn as men and women, yet the literature is difficult and alien to minds of the ordinary European formation, because these men and women are shown as acting in obedience to impulses or prohibitions which our imagination simply cannot share. There is, moreover, throughout the whole poetry a delight in fantastic exaggeration, alien to the discipline of Greek art under which we have grown up. Probably for a Japanese the description of Cuchulain in his battle-rage would be less strange than to us, when we are asked to picture, not only flames springing from his head, but the calves of his legs twisted to the front with the spasm of his fury.

The other cycle of romance comes a good deal nearer to historic times, and belongs to a changed Ireland. Tara of Meath is now the centre, and the ruling king, Cormac MacArt, figures clearly in Irish annals—separated by perhaps only two centuries from the coming of Patrick. But in this body of legend the king is not the chief figure. All the heroes whose exploits and fortunes and misfortunes make up the stuff of these tales belong to the Fianna, a body of picked fighting men maintained for the defence of Ireland under the leadership of Finn MacCool. According to legend, which probably preserves the main outline of history, this semi-independent force grew overpowerful and arrogant, and finally went into revolt, to be crushed at last by Carbery, Cormac's son and successor, at the battle of Gabhra, not far from Ventry. These men are no longer chariot fighters, but highly trained foot-soldiers, with weapons of iron. There is less of the superhuman and miraculous in the stories of their combats, they strike, as the Homeric heroes struck, only like mortal men, with

spear and sword and shield. There is no Achilles, no Cuchulain, irresistible even to his fellows; each man of them thinks himself as good as another, though some stand out, and in popular tradition certain of them have a special glory in certain parts. Goll MacMorna, for instance, the Ajax of this cycle, is credited in Donegal with feats that Kerry and Cork relate of Caoilte, or of Finn's son Ossian, or of Ossian's son Oscar. But the central figures are Finn himself, in whom strength was backed by magical powers, and Ossian, who was poet as well as warrior.

Blended with them is the one great love story of the cycle, which tells how Gránia, the daughter of King Cormac, was to be married to Finn, and a great wedding-feast was made at Tara, and all the choice men of the Fianna were there with their leader. It was there, according to the story, that Gránia first saw Diarmuid the Brown to whom no woman could refuse her love, there, she put a sleeping potion into the wine and carried it round to all but Diarmuid; and when the rest were drugged to sleep, she demanded of him that he should fly with her. The hero refused, for his loyalty to Finn; but she reminded him that it was *geasa* for him to refuse anything to a woman; and they fled, and for months were in flight through Ireland before the chase of Finn and his companions. But the followers had no will to destroy their comrade, and at last peace was made and Diarmuid lived happy with Gránia in their rath not far inland from Sligo, until at last there was talk of a feast of reconciliation. Here are likenesses to the other story of fugitives. But it is Deirdre who pleads with Naoise and his brothers not to yield to their desire of returning to companionship; it is Gránia who urges Diarmuid, against his will, to make a feast at which Finn shall be their guest. The end is the same, the rejected lover after long years takes his vengeance, and both the stories have recourse to enchantments before the hero can be destroyed.

These two stories—the flight of Deirdre with the sons of Usnach, the flight of Gráma with Diarmuid, the vengeance of Conachar and the vengeance of Finn—are the episodes in this whole body of romance which have afforded most inspiration to those who in our days have reshaped them for Ireland into the English tongue. Yet for Ireland itself, through many centuries, the focus of interest lay in a legend about Ossian which was built up after Ireland became Christian.

A story, which was probably part of the original pre-Christian saga, tells how when the Fianna were on the western shore, a beautiful woman came to them riding across the sea on a white horse. They asked her name and her errand, and she said that she was a king's daughter from an island beyond the waves, and had refused all offers of love, that she had come to seek a lover among the Fianna, and that Ossian was her choice, if he would venture. So Ossian mounted the horse with her and crossed the waves, and with her he forgot all until the waves washed up on that enchanted shore a branch that came from Ireland, and he began, as the Irish phrase is, to think long for his country and comrades. Niav, his fairy mistress, begged of him not to leave her, but he said that if he might have her fairy horse he would go to Ireland, set his eyes once more on it and return. She agreed to this, but warned him never to dismount or set foot on the soil of Ireland.

Then, as the Christian imagination shaped the story, he crossed the sea again and came to an Ireland full of little stone houses and of bells ringing. The people were all to his eye miserably stunted, and of the Fianna there was no trace. He turned his horse to ride back, when he saw four men struggling to lift a sack of sand. Stooping contemptuously from his horse to throw the sack before him, he burst his saddle girth and fell to the ground, and in a moment the pains of age seized him. They brought him

to St. Patrick, who undertook to make a Christian of the old withered hulk. Thus, in this later form, the stories of the deeds of the Fianna are told in a dialogue between the unregenerate pagan and the Christian apostle of meekness. A fragment will show the character.

*Patrick* "Finn is in hell in bonds, the pleasant man who used to bestow gold, in penalty of his disobedience to God, he is now in the house of pain insane. Misery attend thee, old man, who speakest words of madness. God is better for one hour than all the Fenians of Erin."

*Ossian* "Were my son Oscar and God hand to hand on Knock-na-vean, if I saw my son down, it is then I would say God was a strong man. Were there a place above or below better than heaven, it is there Finn would go, and all the Fenians he had."

I need not enlarge on this literature, of which Europe first got some inkling through Macpherson's adaptation. But it is necessary to point out that in Gaelic the two cycles are kept wholly distinct, whereas Macpherson draws now on one, now on the other. Also, it is to be noted that the later cycle had by far the wider popularity in Ireland.

How far this was the case while there was still a professional bardic order trained to preserve by memory and by writing these old tales, we can only guess. But from the seventeenth century onward that order was in rapid decay: by the eighteenth it was gone, and the great bulk of the manuscripts had perished with it. Yet I set down here from my own recollection two notes which show how widespread was the hold on Irish memory wherever Gaelic was still a spoken speech, even in this twentieth century.

At Glencar in Kerry I was fishing in early spring, when salmon were scarce, but I had risen one in the hotel stretch.

Another angler came past me from the lower water which he rented privately, and said I might go down and try my luck on it. As I was moving off, my gillie who had been the companion of anglers there for fifty years, said to me "*Rachamud mar Oisín d'éis na bFiannaigh*" I understood the words, but not the meaning, went down, with no result, and then said, "We'll go back and try again the fish we saw." "He'll be gone out of it long ago," said Micky Moriarty, "with the flood that was in it. Didn't I say we'd be like Ossian coming back and finding all his friends gone?" It had never occurred to him that a man who knew even a little Gaelic should not understand so simple a way of putting advice.

Much about the same time (some thirty years ago) I found a man in Donegal who had his head full of old songs, and asked him for one about Cuchulain. That was troublesome to him, he said, if I wanted a song about Ossian and the Fianna, I could have as many as I liked, but he had not much of the older stories. Yet he had the story of the fight between Cuchulain and his son, which I wrote down as best I could from his dictation. It was in an Irish several centuries old, and as I asked him to explain what he repeated, he often could give no clear account, and at last told me plump that it was in "ould cramp Irish very strong, and he could not be telling me the meaning of every little word that was in it." But when I had gone over my dictation with an Irish-speaking schoolmaster and tried to straighten it out, I brought back the result and the shanachy was furious about the changes. "Some one," he said, "has been trying to make it easy that's not the way you'll write it. You'll write it down the way I have it." Later, I found a version of the same in print, and was able to track out some of the "old cramp words." But Miss Brooke's version lacked one or two of the best quatrains which had been handed down to this technically.

illiterate peasant by his equally illiterate mother, and by who knows how many generations before

I cannot say whether the memory of that shanachy held anything that was not in verse. But in the earliest forms of the sagas, preserved in manuscripts of the tenth and eleventh centuries, they are mainly in prose, with long poems inset. The prose is highly ornate and artificial, such as probably then existed in no European language, other than Latin or Greek. The verse, as apparently all Irish verse had been from pre-Christian times, was built up about an elaborate system of interlocked rhyme, strongly supported by assonance.

I need not go into the question whether Europe at large owes the use of rhyme to the Irish; though rhyme does not appear in the continental literatures until Europe had been permeated in all directions by wandering missionaries and scholars from Ireland, all of whom were familiar with this artifice, used for centuries in their race. But the point is that so far back as we can trace facts with certainty—say fifteen hundred years—Ireland possessed not only a literature, but one which implied an elaborate culture—just as did the Irish metalwork. Her rhyming system was much more intricate than any which is used even in modern English literature, and demanded a highly trained ear. It was consonantal rhyme, but certain groups of consonants were allowed to rhyme together; thus “rap” was a rhyme for “cat.” In the same way the “slender” vowels, *i* and *e*, rhymed; “net” would rhyme with “lip,” but was not a rhyme to “sat,” since *a* was one of the “broad” vowels. Only after long practice can the ear trained to our system follow out these faint echoes of the rhyming sound.

In other ways, too, the structure was most complex. All poems were composed in quatrains: the sense must

never overlap from stanza to stanza . and a break at the end of the second line was always imposed The lines were measured by syllables like the Greek and Latin, not by accent, and, being generally short, tended to force a highly elliptic and condensed method of expression, so that the mind must leap quick to follow it

It was rather in the prose that Gaelic delight indulged most freely in the marvellous, and in a more than Rabelaisian accumulation of words—a quality of mind that matched the Gaelic illuminator's passion for weaving loop within loop of the endless spiral until no eye could track out the design

Norse invasions from the ninth century to the eleventh threatened the whole national life of Ireland and inflicted much destruction—especially of books, which in Ireland were treasures A long story tells how the whole script of the Táin was lost and only recovered by a miracle But when Ireland under the strong King Brian got the upper hand, the King's first care was to revive learning and renew the store of books In the century and a half between his death and the Norman invasion, Ireland was torn with internal wars, but Gaelic culture none the less steadily revived When the imperial power that ruled from Berwick to Bordeaux thrust its grip over the lesser island, Norman conquest broke up the old Gaelic order so far as it could, and replaced it by feudal institutions and by a law strange to the Gael, under which indeed the Gael had no rights Yet within a century Norman lords also had their Gaelic poets—and not only those who, like the de Burgos, became all but wholly Gaelic in their way of life and jurisdiction Geraldines of Kildare and of Desmond Butlers of Ormond, were patrons of Irish poetry, and the bardic schools maintained their intensive training

It does not appear that, in these centuries which led up to the final destruction of Gaelic culture in the reign of



James I, anything was added to the mass of saga or romance though the old was continually handed down and in the transmission reshaped and modernized. Poets were now allied to the historian as recorders and commentators, making their songs of praise or satire. How much worth there is which survives of their work may be questioned; certainly it is not all high poetry. But it is all educated work, maintaining throughout a strict standard of literary style. Nothing could be less like folk-song than this verse, as professional in its way as the work of Pope's day in English. Yet, unlike Pope and his contemporaries who sought to be clear as the clearest prose, these professional bards disdained the common public. They wrote for the learned who could judge their technical skill and follow their allusions.

A great change came with the seventeenth century when the old patrons of the professional poets began to be rooted out of the soil, and it was plain to all the Gaels that the whole structure of Gaelic knowledge might be ruined and disappear. Two works are significant, dating from the first thirty years after Elizabeth's death. One is the vast compilation known as the *Annals of the Four Masters*, made by four scribes working in Donegal. They had travelled all over Ireland seeking out whatever chronicles were preserved, and from them they put together year by year an account of the history of Ireland as the Gael knew it. The book is now indispensable to students, but even men who know modern Gaelic read it in a translation; for it was deliberately written in the archaic language still maintained by the professional schools. An Irish chieftain paid for the work and it was preserved carefully apart.

But, about the same time, a priest, Geoffrey Keating, faced with the same fact of decaying knowledge, wrote a history of Ireland in the language of his day; and hundreds of copies of his book were made in writing and passed

from hand to hand all over Gaelic Ireland. About the same time, though somewhat later and with more resistance, a similar change came over poetry. There were no patrons to pay for learned work, and poets wrote now regardless of the schools and the rules, so that every one could understand them. The form of verse changed, longer and looser metres, measured by stress not by syllables, were introduced. Yet, even in this breakaway from tradition the traditional impress remained. This also was no folk poetry, but work rich with interlocked assonance, ringing the changes upon alternating vowels, rich also with coloured words. It was through this medium that all through the eighteenth century peasants, who might be schoolmasters one year and roving scythemen the next, uttered in many forms the cry of revolt which was always in its essence the cry of an old proud race, proud of its own inheritance, yet trampled down by men who had no care for any culture.

This literature, because it is lyrical, defies translation and indeed, what lyric can be rendered? But this group of poems is specially difficult, first, because of the cast of mind given when Ireland had a formed literature of its own, and the rest of Europe was taking its prose and poetry from the Greek and Latin, secondly, because it is profoundly influenced, I think, by Irish music the Gaelic art on which least hindrance had been placed, and the sense of it cannot be divorced from the sound.

To those who knew the language this later literature was a rich possession, but only to them. Its influence could hardly be felt until the language itself became again an object of national study. But in the epic cycles stories were to be found, and a story can be told in another language. English-speaking Ireland, seeking to enrich an Irish literature, drew first on the stories invented in the youth of the race.

## CHAPTER III

THOMAS MOORE

WHEN we say that Irish literature in the English tongue begins with the nineteenth century, it has to be added that its beginners grew up among, and were formed by, the circumstances which make the years from 1782 to 1800 a turning point in Irish history.

Broadly speaking, Ireland throughout the eighteenth century was a country increasingly in revolt against the injustices of the British colonial system, and increasingly conscious of its separate and distinct national existence. That revolt was led by Protestant gentlemen who differed no more from their English contemporaries than Washington did, or Alexander Hamilton. Swift, who first urged them to think of themselves as a Nation, urged them to demand the same rights as were enjoyed by the people of which they were an offshoot. The grievances of which they complained, the restrictions on their liberty, just were, as in America, mainly economic. Such a movement of revolt may lead to war, as it led in America; it will produce, as it produced both in America and in Ireland, a powerful literature of argument and rhetoric, which even after the passage of generations can be enjoyed and admired. But it will not produce poetry. That springs from motives less material. If, as I think, there is in Grattan's speeches a strain of poetry not to be found in the American orators, that is because Grattan sought to identify himself with a

nation in whose long history the dominant themes were not economic or fiscal

Yet even in Grattan's speeches you would search in vain for that sense of Ireland's past which pervades all the poetry which in Grattan's lifetime was written by Irishmen in Irish and the essential failure of Grattan's policy was that he could not bring those who resented economic servitude imposed on Ireland from outside to do away with the far more galling restraints which they themselves inflicted on the majority of native Irishmen. Yet first the American revolution, with which all Ireland sympathized, and then the more startling upheaval in France, had injected unrest into the strangely constituted conglomerate that Grattan at least called his nation. For a hundred years Catholic Ireland had lain, as Swift described it, a chained lion with teeth drawn and claws cut, it is only the Gaelic poems which let us know how fiercely the Jacobite feeling worked in Ireland. But the Presbyterians, Swift's "angry cat at large," had more freedom of movement, they were in revolt against the land laws, and offshoots from them, Ulster emigrants, had been a potent factor in the American revolt. Ulster Presbyterians were as a body strongly infected with those notions of liberty, equality, and fraternity which began to make headway also among the Catholics. Revolt of the disfranchised was stirred up in the main by Protestant Liberals and by discontented Presbyterians, but the organization of United Irishmen included all creeds. Revolt came in 1798 and left Ireland far more conscious than ever of its divisions. But for the first time since Sarsfield led his troops to France, Catholic Ireland had resisted.

The fiercest centre of resistance had been in Wexford, a county in the main English-speaking. Now for the first time there begins to be a popular ballad literature in English, and what is more significant, the best of it is

anonymous. No one knows who wrote "The Wearing of the Green," which dates from the year when rebellion was getting ready: still less is it clear where the "Shan van Vocht" came from. These things may not be poetry, but no one can deny that they are very good songs: and they are songs made to fit old Irish airs. Music was the link between the old Ireland that spoke Irish and the new multitudes which used another tongue.

The revolutionary spirit in Ireland may certainly be said to have begun after the French Revolution, and so did the counter-revolutionary Orange organization. Neither of them has ended yet. But in the last years of the eighteenth century revolutionary Ireland was looking to France for support against the counter-revolutionary.

"Oh the French are on the say,  
Says the Shan van Vocht,  
The French are in the Bay  
They'll be here without delay,  
And the Orange will decay,  
Says the Shan van Vocht."

The national literature of Ireland in English sprang from the revolutionary spirit, and within a few years it had found a national poet, who was inspired, more fully than any other poet has ever been, by the traditional music of his country.

Singularly enough at the very same time there began to be a distinctive literature of the Ireland which was not "national" . . . written by people who had their roots in the soil, but not in the life of the nation; whose whole existence was passed among the completely Irish, and yet was divided from them by a deep severance, partly in religion, but more intimately in the other fundamental question of ownership—of right to the soil. The history

that I have to trace shows how the dissident strain tended to merge itself in the other, until at present, after five generations, there is at least something like fusion. But there were from the beginnings of Irish literature in English two ways of life in Ireland, and a great deal of what was written has throughout concerned itself with the fact of this duality. I must trace first the main stem, though for a long time the graft was more conspicuous than the parent stock.

Thomas Moore, whom for a hundred years Ireland accepted without question as her national poet, was the eldest child of a Catholic household in Dublin. His father came from Kerry, his mother, Anastasia Clodd, from Wexford. I see no jot of evidence that either of them knew Irish, and this means that the father must have been brought up away from his native county, where Irish was then all but universally spoken. Probably he inherited the business by which he prospered—a grocer's shop in 12 Aungier Street, which runs from Dame Street towards Rathmines. It is in the heart of old Dublin, close to the Liberties of St. Patrick's, where the poor have always swarmed; but Grafton Street and St. Stephen's Green are not far away, the Moores may have had well-to-do customers. At all events they were able to give their clever petted boy the best education that was to be had in Dublin. Clever he was, in the way that most made for petting, a natural-born actor and mimic, who seems to have been also writing verses as soon as he could make pot-hooks and hangers. He went to the school of Samuel Whyte, author of a didactic poem on "The Theatre," a great director of private theatricals and a teacher of elocution. So from the first Master Moore shone, and when a piano was bought for his sister, he taught himself to play, and very early developed his uncanny gift of dramatic singing to his own accompaniment. All these talents were displayed at gay

little parties which his mother delighted to give ; and even the honours of print were attained by him as early as his fifteenth year, when the " *Anthologia Hibernica* " published his lines, " To Zelia, on her charging the author with writing too much on love."

Very few poets have had so happy a youth, and though petted Moore was never spoiled : he was a most loving and dutiful son. But he would have been the better of more toughening, and he knew it. Later, when a guest at Abbotsford, he realized what the open-air life had been worth to Scott, and told his friend so :

" I said that the want of this manly training showed itself in my poetry, which would perhaps have had a far more vigorous character, if it had not been for the sort of *boudoir* education I had received. The only thing, indeed," he adds, " that conduced to brace and invigorate my mind was the strong political feelings that were stirring round me when I was a boy, and in which I took a deep and most ardent interest."

unrest, and in 1794, when Moore was admitted to Trinity College, Dublin seethed with political excitement. His case was typical. His Catholic parents thought at first of entering him as a Protestant, since a Catholic would be disqualified for either scholarship or fellowship. But finally they accepted the disqualification, and probably the young men with whom he made friends were the more ready to give him their confidence.

It seemed for a moment as if Catholic hopes would be realized, but in March 1795 the recall of Lord Fitzwilliam, who had raised the hopes, threw advocates of freedom back on conspiracy. Young men in the University talked treason, and among them was Robert Emmet, whose speeches in the debating societies attracted much attention. Moore, who had become intimate with this brilliant senior student, wrote in *The Press* (a paper started by the United Irishmen) a "Letter to the Students of Trinity College," which was considered "very bold." But he was urged against such action first by his mother, and then more notably, by Robert Emmet, who pointed out that it was likely to call the attention of the authorities to the "good work (as we both considered it) which was going on there so quietly." Moore notes also that Emmet never suggested that he should join the United Irishmen, "a forbearance which I attribute a good deal to his knowledge of the watchful anxiety about me which prevailed at home."

When official inquiry was held within Trinity College, Emmet refused to appear. One of his associates, Hamilton appeared before the inquisitors, declined to answer certain questions and was struck off the University rolls—thus incurring the penalty which Emmet had automatically accepted, of exclusion from all the learned professions. Moore consulted with his parents as to what he should do, and in accordance with their judgment, when he was



called, declared in advance that he would answer no question which might incriminate others. No such question was put, and from this time forward Moore seems to have kept clear of dangerous courses

But his conduct in many difficult junctures later can lead only to one conclusion. that he would, if put to the test, have acted as a man of the strictest honour, at any sacrifice. He had been too softly reared, but the ideals of conduct which he formed in youth never lost their hold on him.

He does not appear ever to have met Lord Edward Fitzgerald, then the idol of revolutionary Ireland; and there is no trace of continuing intimacy between him and Robert Emmet. Yet Emmet first stirred in him the instinct of hero-worship, and the gift by which Moore earned the notice of the elder and graver youth was that gift which determined Moore's fame. He was to Emmet, long before he was to the world, an interpreter of that music which expressed the spirit of Ireland. Professor Trench has pointed out that in 1792 some gentlemen organized in Belfast (then a centre of revolutionary nationalism) a harpers' festival, gathering the bards (most of them blind) to play the music which had descended to them unbrokenly from the dim centuries. Knowledge of the Irish airs first came to Moore in Trinity from a fellow-student, Edward Hudson, who was a United Irishman. In 1795 a great body of the airs became accessible, when Bunting, set on the quest by what he had heard at the Belfast gathering, issued his "General Collection of the Ancient Irish Music." These were airs only, with no words to them, but the young Moore got the airs into the marrow of his bones, as he played them over and over at the piano. He himself tells us that as he was playing "Let Erin Remember," Emmet sprang up and cried, "Oh, if I was at the head of thirty thousand men marching to that air!" Now, as Professor Trench points out, the song "Let Erin

"Remember" was not written till ten years later what Emmet had heard Moore play was a traditional air, "The Little Red Fox" But when Moore noted the reminiscence in his diary, he, like all the world, associated the tune with the words by which he had spread it broadcast over all English-speaking countries—among which Ireland was to be reckoned even then

Thus whatever is vital in the formation of Ireland's national poet springs from the early revolutionary period, but more specially from his years in Trinity College, and the formation shows two dominant influences—the political sentiment of cultured revolutionary Ireland, and the music which came down from Irish hills and glens, transmitted by pleasant memory There is more than an accidental connection between the attempt to revive and preserve Ireland's national music and the attempt to link all Ireland into one insurgent people

But it was not as a national poet that Moore first came by recognition in Ireland and in the English-speaking world For his first important attempts in verse he turned to translation from the classics and went to Dr Kearney Provost of Trinity, with a handful of renderings from Anacreon—suggesting that his industry should be recompensed with "some honour or reward" Dr Kearney doubted "whether the Board could properly confer any public reward upon the translation of a work so amatory and convivial", and certainly in Moore's version Anacreon lost nothing of these qualities But he advised publication, saying with an agreeable humanity, "The young people will like it"—as indeed they did Even after the *Irish Melodies* became famous Moore was currently described in the *Irish Press* as 'Anacreon Moore'

But before the work came to publication the poet had established his footing in London, where after graduating

at Trinity College he went to enter as a law student. A leading civil servant in Dublin had given him an introduction to Lord Moira, afterwards (as the Marquis of Hastings) Governor-General of India : and this great nobleman, who has left an honourable name in history, took the young man under his patronage. So helped, Moore had a rapid social success : and when "Anacreon" appeared in 1800 it was dedicated to the Prince of Wales in whom fashion centred. Very shortly after its successor came the "Poems by the late Thomas Little, Esq.," even more amatory than the translations.

There is no denying that Moore's success was social at first rather than literary. Nobody could resist his charm, and men were attracted as much as women. But it is equally undeniable that Moore assisted powerfully in that breakaway from alien fetters, imposed by eighteenth century taste on the natural lyric freedom of English verse. He showed the way back to the time, not perhaps of Shakespeare, but of Crashaw, Suckling, and Herrick. Of the three poets who in his period achieved immense popularity, he did far more than either of the others—Scott and Byron—to advance the technique of English verse. Even Shelley owes more to his example in metrical effects than is generally recognized, and Tennyson also profited.

It is hard to know how much a native Irishman, divorced from all the tradition of Gaelic speech and history, can be influenced by the past of his race. But, as has been seen, the Irish had evolved a most elaborate metrical system and had also a music of their own. Skill in metre and skill in music were Irish qualities, and Moore was haunted by airs transmitted from the period when Gaelic was still the main speech of Ireland. Probably most of these airs were composed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when Irish verse had broken away from strict syllabic restraint.

and become rather a grouping of stresses. Moore, as his skill developed, was to lead the way in harmonious and flowing verse which, though its rhythm was easy to follow, defied exact scansion and this becomes more apparent when he set himself to find words for Irish melodies. To this extent he was, I think, from the first definitely Irish, yet in other respects the beginnings of the national poet were oddly incongruous. Literary success soon prompted him to give up thoughts of the bar, but like every young man of that day, he had hopes of a post to be provided at the public expense through Government influence—represented by Lord Moira. The first proposal was to create an Irish laureateship (with a suitably small salary) and bestow it on the young poet. This project was mooted in 1803—the year of Emmet's rising. Fortunately, Moore after some consideration put the idea aside, on the advice of his father. Laureateships at that period were by no means held in honour. But Moore was perfectly ready to accept a provision for life from Government—provided only that the person to whom he owed it was a supporter of Catholic emancipation.

What Lord Moira got him was a place as registrar of a prize court in the West Indies, so that he sailed for Bermuda in 1803, and was abroad a year—part of which was spent in America. Fame had preceded him. A watchmaker at Niagara refused to take money for some repairs "as the only mark of respect he could pay one he had heard so much of." The next volume of his verse, published in 1806, contained one of the songs by which he is still remembered—"The Canadian Boat Song." After that he sat down to the work by which alone he is significant. Early in 1807 he drafted the prefatory letter to be published by William Power, owner of a music warehouse in Dublin, whose brother James had a similar establishment in the Strand. Since in my view the *Irish Melodies* are the true

beginning of a national Irish literature in Ireland's second language, this document must be given almost in full.

"I feel very anxious that a work of this kind should be undertaken. We have too long neglected the only talent for which our English neighbours ever deigned to allow us any credit. Our National Music has never been properly collected, and while the composers of the Continent have enriched their Operas and Sonates with Melodies borrowed from Ireland—very often without even the honesty of acknowledgment—we have left these treasures in a great degree, unclaimed and fugitive. Thus our airs, like too many of our countrymen, have, for want of protection at home, passed into the service of foreigners. But we are come, I hope, to a better period in both Politics and Music; and how much they are connected, in Ireland at least, appears too plainly in the tone of sorrow and depression which characterizes most of our early Songs

those airs, and the lawless kind of metre which it will in consequence be necessary to adapt to them. In these instances, the Poet must write, not to the eye, but to the ear. That beautiful air, 'The Twisting of the Rope,' is one of those wild and sentimental rakes which it will not be very easy to tie down in sober wedlock with Poetry."

There is no sense in pretending that Moore was a great man, and not all the applause, not even the applause of men who were great, induced him to mistake his own stature. But one thing has to be clearly apprehended. In his narrative poems, in his satires, in his prose writings, we get Thomas Moore, and nothing more than Thomas Moore. In the *Irish Melodies* we get a sensitive and most accomplished master of verse interpreting the spirit of a country which had already found expression in another medium. Musicians must decide how much was lost in the interpretation, but as a matter of literary history Ireland recognized her own spirit, and the world recognized it, in the *Irish Melodies*.

Most of the best were written between the spring of 1807 and the close of 1810, and during almost the whole of this time Moore was in Ireland, and enjoying himself in Ireland. In 1808, 1809, and 1810 he was a leading figure at the performances of the Kilkenny Theatre—then a great social event. In the spring of 1811 he married Elizabeth Dyke, one of the professional actresses who were engaged for these theatricals. She was sixteen, lovely, and penniless, and she made him one of the best wives remembered in literary history. If they did not live happy ever after, that was not from any failure in Moore's devotion or in hers.

But from that time forward Moore had a rapidly growing family to provide for, and after the first child's birth it became plain that Lord Moira could not secure the

provision which his protégé had always hoped for. Literature had now to be the sole support, and the Powers agreed to pay £500 a year for a monopoly of Moore's musical compositions. Further, he had to be man of letters as well as poet. He had indeed already commenced satirist with his Popian essays, "Corruption and Intolerance," published in 1808; but it was in 1813 that his true vein for light mockery was disclosed by his "Twopenny Postbag." This must certainly be counted as a part of Irish literature, since its shafts were directed specially against the opponents of Catholic emancipation; and in the fourteenth edition Moore, though still maintaining his assumed name of "Thomas Brown the Younger," avowed that "to the charge of being an Irishman poor Mr. Brown pleads guilty; and I believe it must also be acknowledged that he comes of a Roman Catholic family. But," it goes on, "it does not necessarily follow that Mr. Brown is a Papist."

It is not too much to say that at this time of his life Moore remained a Catholic only on a point of honour. While Catholics as Catholics were under disqualifications, he could never make a profitable change of religion. But his wife was a Protestant, and he preferred that his children should be brought up in her faith. Later, as his mind became active under the stimulus of attacks on Catholicism, he began to inquire into the Protestant position and passed to counter-attack.

For the six years which followed his marriage—1811 to 1817—although some Edinburgh reviewing added to his resources, he was in the main writing verse. Light satire ("The Fudge Family Abroad"), more of the *Melodies*, but chiefly his long poem, *Lalla Rookh*, for which he got £3,000. As soon as he got it, he settled down into a little thatched cottage at Sloperston, near Bowood, the great mansion of his friend Lord Lansdowne, the great

Whig peer, and then came the news that the deputy, whom he had appointed in Bermuda to do his prize-court work at half the profits, had embezzled sums amounting to £6,000, for which Moore was liable. Two years later he had to move to Paris to avoid imprisonment for debt, with the result that he and his lovely wife were lionized on the Continent more even than they had been lionized in London.

It is unnecessary to discuss *Lalla Rookh* beyond saying that its vogue was incredible, and that the publishers for years regarded it as "the cream of the copyrights." Byron's romantic poems with which it competed are almost as dead, yet Byron wrote of the East where he had travelled in days when a traveller must become an actor in every scene through which he moved. Scott's have more life in them, for Scott wrote of the Border where he was bred, and his verse has been preserved by the piety of Scotsmen. Moore's only vital connection with his theme was that which he describes in a preface to the edition of 1841:

"Fortunately, as it proved, the thought occurred to me of founding a story on the fierce struggle so long maintained between the *Ghebers*, or ancient Fire Worshipers of Persia, and their haughty Moslem masters. From that moment a new and deep interest in my whole task took possession of me. The cause of tolerance was again my inspiring theme, and the spirit that had spoken in the melodies of Ireland soon found itself at home in the East."

To that extent *Lalla Rookh* is the expression of an Irish poet. Yet Moore knew where his strength lay, and told his publishers that "if anything of mine can last to posterity, those little ponies, the *Melodies*, will beat the *Lalla* mare hollow."



Moore's fame and his amazing popularity, both literary and personal, which made Byron dedicate his "Corsair" to "the poet of all circles and the idol of his own," have at least this significance for Ireland that wherever Moore was celebrated, it was as champion of the Irish cause. Among the poets whom Shelley describes as weeping for Adonais, Moore appears. "Sad Ierne sent the sweetest lyrist of her saddest wrong." And in Dublin, where he went for a fortnight in May 1818, a great public dinner was given in his honour, and at the theatre he was called repeatedly to make his bow from the front of the box. In short, he had in Ireland the sort of homage which Walter Scott received in Scotland, and he welcomed it as "scarcely more delightful to me on my own account than as a proof of the strong spirit of nationality among my countrymen."

This homage never failed him; and though from middle-age onward he did less and less to increase his fame and Ireland's by poetry, he was increasingly the champion of Ireland in satire and in prose.

him to enter parliament in their interest, the people of Limerick even proposed to buy an estate which should give him the necessary qualification. But Moore answered that he preferred holding on his free course. "But the cause which had been his first inspiration," he added, "should be his last—the cause of Irish freedom."

Almost comically, at the same time a Whig government was offering to put him in as member for Dublin University. He refused this on the very different ground that the Whigs had resorted to coercion.

There is no need to go further into his story, except to note that the last work of length which he wrote was a *History of Ireland*. He undertook it with laudable intentions, but only after it was far advanced did he discover by meeting Petrie and other scholars that long, ancient histories of Ireland in the Gaelic tongue existed, and that men could read them. "Good God!" he said. "Why did I ever undertake to write a history of Ireland?"

Moore finished that book in 1845 when he was sinking into a coma that was only ended by death in 1850. His *Life* was written, according to an old promise, by Lord John Russell, then Prime Minister, and was paid for on a scale suited to the author's importance. It is ironically characteristic that this last and great service to Ireland should have been carried out by the Minister who was in charge of Ireland's destinies during the Famine. The same hint of irony flickers over the whole record of Moore's career, literary and personal, but no one who approaches that record candidly will fail to realize that in this little dandy there was not only charm but a deep-seated gallantry and generosity, which won him the friendship of such manly men as Walter Scott and Byron.

In Ireland, while any lived who had heard Moore sing his songs, it was never felt that he needed a defender. The

same gratitude which flowed out to him living was continued to the dead. Within the last fifty years a great change has to be noted, though even to-day, "She is far from the Land," "The Harp that once," and perhaps a dozen others are living, not merely as songs but as lyrics that can still move us by the perfect felicity of their utterance when sung. They are in truth not poetry in the highest sense, but a cross between lyric poetry and rhetoric.

Nearly all the best lyric poetry (even the songs in Shakespeare's plays) loses something by being sung, Burns is perhaps the only exception, Moore's gains, because it is specially adapted to that medium. Much that was written for music will remind one of Figaro's saying "*Ce qui ne vaut pas la peine d'être dit en prose, on le chante*", but by common consent Moore's songs, when Moore sang them, affected those who heard them like the most moving oratory. Singing for him seems to have been very close to a most skilful declamation, and with the plangent quality of his voice to help, he nearly always succeeded in drawing actual tears by the perfect utterance of a moving sentiment. What is sung can never be caught so easily as what is spoken, and words for singing must carry their meaning easily through the ear to the intelligence—more easily even than the orator's. Moore was led therefore to a strict economy of ideas, to expand rather than to condense his meaning; and in the *Melodies* the whole song is often merely the skilful and deliberate unfolding of a single metaphor. They display an art far more akin to the rhetorician's than to the poet's.

Robert Emmet closed that speech in the dock, which holds high place among the scriptures of the Irish people, with the words "When my country shall have taken her place among the nations of the world, then, and not till then, let my epitaph be written." Memory of those words were caught up in Moore's lyric.

" O breathe not his name, let it sleep in the shade,  
Where cold and unhonoured his ashes are laid ,  
Sad, silent, and dark be the tears that we shed,  
As the night-dew that falls on the grass o'er his head

But the night-dew that falls, though in silence it weeps,  
Shall brighten with verdure the grave where he sleeps ,  
And the tear that we shed, though in secret it rolls,  
Shall long keep his memory green in our souls "

No one can doubt but that Emmet's utterance was the real poem, Moore's only an ingenious amplification of part of it Yet Moore's lyric was worth much to Ireland

Still, there is no denying that Moore's example helped to strengthen the rhetorical tendency which disfigured Irish verse through the greater part of last century—though *this* was perhaps inevitable in a literature whose inspiration was so largely political But it should be noted also that Moore, ignorant of the Irish language, caught from the Irish airs something of the peculiar dragging cadence which has been specially characteristic of the later literary movement headed by Yeats There is a touch of it in his well-known lyric

" At the mid hour of night, when the stars are weeping, I  
fly  
To the lone vale we lov'd when life shone warm in thine  
eye "

above all in the last line

Faintly answering still the notes that were once so dear "

Even in Goldsmith one finds this cadence, when for once Goldsmith also wrote to an Irish air, in the song intended to have been sung by Miss Hardcastle in *She Stoops to Conquer* " Ah me ! when shall I marry me ? " Listen to the last two lines .

"She that gives all to the false one pursuing her  
Makes but a penitent, and loses a lover"

Yet these cadences might be matched, though not often, in the Elizabethan or Jacobean lyrics. A totally different rhythm is heard in Moore's lyric, "The Irish Peasant to his Mistress":

"Through grief and through danger thy smile hath cheer'd  
my way  
Till hope seemed to bud from each thorn that round me  
lay."

This recurs again and again in the Gaelic verse of the eighteenth century, and it should be observed that here, as in the Gaelic *aíslíng* or "vision," the mistress is a personification—either of Ireland, or perhaps of the Catholic Church under penal laws:

"Thy rival was honour'd, while thou wast wrong'd and  
scorn'd  
Thy crown was of briars, while gold her brow adorn'd;  
She woo'd me to temples, whilst thou lay'st hid in caves,  
Her friends were all masters, while thine, alas! were  
slaves;  
Yet cold in the earth, at thy feet, I would rather be  
Than wed what I lov'd not, or turn one thought from  
thee."

Yeats, I think, learned from that rhythm, which tempts and baulks the ear, but no one else writing in English caught its movement, with the notable exception of two among Moore's contemporaries, Jeremiah Callanan and Edward Walsh, both of whom were Irish speakers; and neither of them ever used this type of metre except in translating from the Irish. Here is a stanza of Walsh's.

" Have you been at Carrick, and saw you my true-love  
 there,  
 And saw you her features, all beautiful, bright and fair ?  
 Saw you the most fragrant, flowery, sweet apple-tree ?  
 Oh ' saw you my loved one, and pines she in grief like  
 me ? "

Callanan has it even more markedly in " The Outlaw of  
 Loch Lene "

" Oh, many a day have I made good ale in the glen,  
 That came not of stream or malt, like the brewing of men  
 My bed was the ground, my roof the greenwood above,  
 And the wealth that I sought, one fair kind glance from  
 my love

'Tis down by the lake where the wild tree fringes its  
 sides  
 The maid of my heart, the fair one of heaven, resides ,  
 I think, as at eve she wanders its mazes along,  
 The birds go to sleep by the sweet wild twist of her song "

Yet generations had to go by before the experiments of  
 these men were noted, and before a diffused study of Gaelic  
 sent men back to native sources of inspiration. And so far  
 as Moore's contribution to the technique of poetry in Anglo-  
 Irish literature is to be judged by its results, one can only  
 find that what was imitated in him was his facility and his  
 fluency.

## CHAPTER IV

MARIA EDGEWORTH

LITERATURE is always to some extent the expression of a society. In Ireland, throughout the eighteenth century, there were two societies absolutely distinct, and in the main marked off by language. One of these was a nation of peasants, for such of the upper classes as were left in Catholic Ireland had to seek employment abroad, and become French or German or Spanish in their speech and associations more often than English. This peasant society was, as has been seen, still producing for itself a literature in its own language. The other "nation," the Anglo-Irish, had scarcely become conscious of itself as a nation till half-way through the century; and the year which closed the century closed its separate political existence. From 1780 to 1800 at all events Dublin was a true metropolis for the Anglo-Irish. The seat of government was there, and though the actual heads of government, the Lord-Lieutenant and Chief Secretary, were almost invariably English, the parliament which considered Irish affairs, and in great measure shaped Irish policy, was Anglo-Irish. Its existence was too brief to have any lasting effect on the features of the country, but it left its mark on the capital, which within the fifty years before 1800 had been adorned with several public buildings and hundreds of noble mansions. All these belonged exclusively to the Anglo-Irish world, and when the political independence of that nation was withdrawn, life began to ebb out of these splendours.

Dublin, which had been in the eighteenth century a normal capital, became the expression of an abnormal society, and from the first, pens were busy depicting the strange medley that made up the kingdom of Ireland. Indeed for a hundred years Ireland was to be the standing joke of the British Empire—the clown in the cast. English writers, even down to Meredith, when they introduced an Irishman introduced him as a comic character. While the Irish, to whichever part of the nation they belonged, knew well enough that wild grief went with wild mirth, and that the conditions of Irish life bred savage crime and many special kinds of villainy.

Yet with few exceptions the work of that imagination which expresses itself through prose was in Ireland seeking for comedy. And those who wrote with intimate knowledge of Ireland were always aware that two separate strains, linked yet always at variance, made up the whole people. Each of these strains observed the other as alien. In one sense Protestant writers knew more of Catholic Ireland than Catholic writers knew of the landlord class, for there was no Irish landlord who was not surrounded by Catholic servants and retainers, whereas the Catholics who wrote had very little intercourse with the Protestant gentry. Yet the lasting effect of the penal laws had been to band Catholic Ireland into what was almost a secret society with its own inherited loyalties and inherited aspirations, and for that reason the life of this Ireland was less open, less easily penetrated, than that of the Protestant race, who, as by right divine, lived in the open, with virtues and vices equally patent and intelligible. But one thing was common to both sections—a complete disregard of law. The Catholic Irishman could not have respect for a system framed to keep him in subjection and dispossessed the Protestant, who found himself in practice free to override ordinary legality in his dealings with the mass of those



about him, did not see why there should be any restraints on his conduct, and frequently used the Catholic community to set law at defiance—appealing instinctively to the loyalty of hereditary servant to hereditary master or overlord. This loyalty sprang abundantly in the native Irish race, as in all primitive peoples; yet there was always present also the deep-seated instinct of the dispossessed to rejoice in and aim at the overthrow of the possessors. Naturally enough, the presence of this instinct was sensed, and resented as treachery by the possessors, who nevertheless continued to count on the loyalty which they accepted as their right.

So, throughout more than a century the conflict went on till the wheel had come full circle. All the literature of Ireland in the English tongue comes from a country tortured and twisted by the throes of a gradual revolution, working its way by the most generous and the most savage impulses among a kind people. Very few writers have approached the study of Ireland without passion, without a strong imaginative bias for one or the other contending strains. Yet at the very outset the elements of the struggle were set out with amazing detachment in a little masterpiece.

Maria Edgeworth was born in 1767 and was therefore twelve years older than Thomas Moore, although he and she made their mark in Irish literature in the same year, 1800. She was the second of her father's first family of five children, and his first bereavement occurred when she was barely six years old. Within four months she had a new mother. Richard Lovell Edgeworth never was long without a wife. He had commenced matrimony at the age of eighteen while still an Oxford undergraduate, so that there was only a gap of twenty years between him and Maria, his steady companion and ally in a life in which wives were successive incidents. The first stepmother

lasted till Maria was thirteen, and was rapidly replaced by a second. After another year or two Mr Edgeworth, whose whole married life or lives had hitherto been spent in England or France, came back to the family seat in County Longford. Maria, then (in 1783) aged fifteen, from the first assisted him in all the duties of his patriarchal position.

The Edgeworths had been in Ireland since Elizabeth's day, and appear to have been normal specimens of the Anglo-Irish gentry with the normal dash of extravagance. Of this the only trace in Richard Lovel Edgeworth was his exuberance in matrimony. Otherwise, he behaved throughout life like the model of a cultivated English gentleman occupying a post of authority in a semi-barbarous land. "Once settled down in his ancestral dominions," Miss Lawless writes in her enchanting study of Maria,

"Mr Edgeworth found himself in what to him must have seemed the very appropriate position of a little local king. Like such a petty monarch he had his levees, his courtiers, his retainers—more or less ragged—like such an one he held his courts of justice, and distributed rewards and punishments—at any rate of a minor kind—pretty much according to his own ideas of justice or expediency."

Maria had every opportunity of observing this petty realm.

"She rode her cob or pony 'Dapple' beside him when he went his rounds. She kept the accounts of the whole expenditure under his directions, she even seems to have acted for him as a sort of clerk or sub-agent."

We may be as sure as of anything not positively re-

corded that Mr. Edgeworth lost no opportunity of drawing whatever moral could be drawn on every occasion. She on her part noted from the first the humours of a scene which was all the more vivid because she had not grown up in it. Also from this time onward she was writing—but writing stories to amuse the younger broods of her father's children. So came into being *The Parents' Assistant*, which for a hundred years at least was helpful to many parents, though not specially to Irish parents. Ireland did not engage her pen (except in letters) until she had been through the rebellion of 1798 and the raid of Humbert's small French force, which got unpleasantly near Edgeworthstown. Matters were well in train for the Legislative Union when she wrote her first Irish novel—*Castle Rackrent*—the only one that she wrote unaided and unhampered. Miss Lawless writes :

"*Castle Rackrent* stands upon an entirely different footing from any of Miss Edgeworth's other writings. In it alone we find her regarding life—not from any utilitarian, ethical, or dogmatic standpoint—but simply and solely objectively, as it strikes, and as it ought to strike, an artist. So far from any cut-and-dry code of morals being enforced in it, morals of every sort are even startlingly absent."

After this Mr. Edgeworth put his oar in, and insisted, we must suppose, not only that the moral should be drawn, but that *Irish life*, the better to set it off, should be placed in contrast with English characters. Unhappily, one after another of those who followed Miss Edgeworth followed the advice of her father, not her original example.

*Castle Rackrent* is described on the title-page as "An Hibernian Tale taken from Facts and from the Manners of the Irish Squires before the year 1782." The year

selected is that one in which the Irish Parliament acquired the power to legislate freely for Ireland. But it marks also virtually the period at which Maria Edgeworth first became acquainted with Ireland. She professes to write, as the title informs us, of an order of things known to her only by hearsay and the preface, dated 1800 (in which we may recognize Mr. Edgeworth's fine Roman hand), sets down complacent observations

"The race of the Rackrents has long since been extinct in Ireland, and the drunken Sir Patrick, the litigious Sir Murtagh, the fighting Sir Kit and the slovenly Sir Condry, are characters which could no more be met with at present in Ireland than Squire Western or Parson Trulliber in England. When Ireland loses her identity by an union with Great Britain she will look back with a smile of good-humoured complacency on the Sir Kits and Sir Condrys of her former existence."

Unfortunately, this did not prove to be true. Anglo-Irish literature in prose fiction continued to be occupied during the whole of the nineteenth century with the conditions produced by a disastrous system of land tenure and the special types evolved among those who paid rents and those who received them. Maria Edgeworth herself in later novels has left us studies of Irish life which, even if they stood alone, would suffice to show how constant in essentials were the recurring types. But neither she nor any of her successors achieved again so masterly a rendering as is *Castle Rackrent* nor one in which characters and situations spoke so eloquently for themselves. The reason is plain. In this first effort she showed us the Irish landlord type as it appeared to a typical *retainer*, whose personality by an extraordinary feat of art, she was able to assume completely. Thady Quirk, through whose account we become ac-

quainted with four successive owners of Castle Rackrent, is native Ireland as Maria Edgeworth knew it. He and his are the permanent background before which the transient lords of the soil play their decorative parts. The limitations of Maria Edgeworth as an Irish novelist are the limitations of her power to apprehend what Thady Quirk really stood for and signified.

It must be said, however, that the Rackrents to whom Thady devoted lifelong allegiance were native Irish also. "Everybody knows," Thady tells us, "this is not the old family name, which was O'Shaughlin, related to the kings of Ireland—but that was before my time." Sir Patrick, first of the dynasty with whom we become acquainted, assumed the name of Rackrent as a condition of succeeding to the estate when his cousin, Sir Tallyhoo Rackrent, broke his neck in the hunting field. This condition "Sir Patrick O'Shaughlin at the time took sadly to heart, they say, but thought better of it afterwards, seeing how large a stake depended upon it." There is no comment. Swift had not set example in vain for this Anglo-Irish writer, and the whole work is shot through and through with the real irony: sentences are put into Thady's mouth which convey at once the mind of the man who utters them, and the artist's unspoken amusement. For instance, when Sir Patrick, the inventor of raspberry whisky, died of his last bumper, Sir Murtagh, who succeeded to the title, was a prudent man, and married into the family of the Skinflints: yet he was not always well guided. "He dug up a fairy mount against my advice," says Thady, "and had no luck afterwards. Though a learned man in the law, he was a little too incredulous in other matters." We are in no doubt how Maria Edgeworth contemplated Thady's belief in fairy powers, and, I think, are quite sure that she found Sir Patrick's attachment to the O'Shaughlin name and its associations very laughable. In *Ennui*, when the hero has

discovered that not he, but his foster brother, the blacksmith, is the real Lord Glenthorn, he resigns name and rank, to make good at the bar as Mr O'Donoghoe. But when, having done so, he is rewarded with the hand and heart of a beautiful heiress, the kind friend suggests that leave may be obtained for him to "take and bear the name and arms of Delamere"—to which his future wife was entitled. And so it would not be necessary to conceive the sound of "Mrs O'Donoghoe's carriage stops the way." A Mrs O'Donoghoe with a carriage would to Maria Edgeworth have been part of the joke of Ireland. That indicates the limitation on Maria Edgeworth's title to be considered one of the national glories. There was very little of the Highlander about Sir Walter Scott, but the name MacGregor, for instance, did not in itself seem to him laughable.

Sir Walter, and every other Scottish novelist who had the gift of humour, laughed at many of the personages whom he created, and laughed at those characteristics in them which were most distinctly Scotch—whether it was in Baillie Nicol Jarvie or Dugald Dalgetty or Cuddie Headrigg, or Dandie Dinmont, or Evan dhu MacCombich, or Monkbarns the Antiquary, or old Lady Grizel in *Old Mortality*. But we never lose the sense that these are his own people. Maria Edgeworth loved Ireland and loved the mere Irish, as an Englishman may love and understand the Italians. And yet that hardly expresses it fully. When Meredith draws Italians, he is neither consciously nor subconsciously the superior of this distinct race. Occasionally, for instance in O'Halloran in the *Absentee*, Maria Edgeworth presents an Irishman of Gaelic stock who is on the English level of culture. She does not say that he is so surprisingly, but one feels that she is conscious of producing what will be difficult of acceptance while her contemporary Lady Morgan in her novel, *O'Donnell*, keeps on emphasizing that an Irish Catholic may conceivably be a cultivated gentleman.

It was of course true that in the Ireland of Miss Edgeworth's day, cultivated Irish Catholic gentry were very rare specimens, and the causes of their fewness were familiar to her. She knew that those of the older race who held the status of gentry and were eligible for preferment, were eligible because a profitable change had been made in their religious attachment—either by themselves or by their predecessors. This upward step was never regarded with admiration, probably no Catholic convert was ever thoroughly respected, except one gentleman who became a Protestant that he might be qualified to fight a duel. These facts of Irish life are not stressed by Maria Edgeworth, but her portraiture is true to them. Count O'Halloran in the *Absentee* is a cultivated man who has followed a military career—in the Austrian service. He has “retired on his estate”—not being qualified for any public office. In *Ormond* Sir Ulrick O'Shane is the native Irishman who has conformed, and, in the opinion of his cousin “King Corny,” lord of the Black Islands, “was never the same man since” and certainly, though not without native generosity, Sir Ulrick has a most accommodating conscience. King Corny himself is an incarnation of the native Irish qualities as Miss Edgeworth conceived them: courageous, generous, ingenious, affectionate, passionate, and unreasonable, ruling capriciously over a people who look to him for favours or penalties—not for justice.

The successive lords of Castle Rackrent are Irishmen of native stock, elevated by conversion to the “ascendancy”; lords paramount in a countryside, so long as the estate can carry their expenditure. They have different ways of squandering, it begins with truly Irish hospitality under Sir Patrick, “who could sit out the best man in Ireland, let alone the three kingdoms itself.” Under Sir Murtagh, a saving man who married a saving woman, the last penny was levied from the tenants, the table was provided with

duty fowls, and whatever else could be offered to propitiate my lady, and all Sir Murtigh's farming operations were carried on free of cost by "duty work", "he taught 'em all, as he said, to know the law of landlord and tenant" His only extravagance was litigation, fed by a quarrelsome temper which ended him with a broken bloodvessel, and so came in Sir Kit, who was free-handed as the day, but unluckily "left all to the agent, and though he had the spirit of a prince, and lived away to the honour of his country, which I was proud to hear of, what were we the better of that at home?" says Thady Money had to be raised by any means and every means and Thady's son, Jason, coming into notice as a useful assistant to the agent at copying the rent accounts, was rewarded with a lease that had just fallen in. Probably when the agent reported that he could raise no more money, Jason was instructed to take over the accounts, and was informed further that Sir Kit was marrying the grandest heiress in England. So Sir Kit brought home his bride, who was a Jewess and unreasonably refused to give up all her diamonds. She was therefore shut up in her room and left there for a matter of seven years, at the end of which Sir Kit became involved in duels with three gentlemen whose sisters put forward claims to be the next Lady Rackrent. After disposing of two, he was shot by the third, and the estate passed to his far-out cousin, Sir Conolly Rackrent, "commonly called for short among his friends Sir Condy," the most universally beloved man that Thady had ever seen or heard of.

But the estate was heavily embarrassed and Jason Quirk, now established as agent, had to explain the difficulties, and be compensated for tiding them over. Thady does not enlarge upon Jason's character, but he shows the steps by which the native Irishman, turning attorney and land-grabber, advanced towards possession, while the native Irish landlord, being what Ireland would call a decent slob of a



man, slipped with lazy good humour deeper into the bog of debt—and then, to crown all, ran away with the daughter of a neighbouring squire, whose fortune was not at her own disposal. But the few thousands which she could command enabled the couple to cut a dash to her liking, while, as for Sir Condry, “all he asked, God bless him, was to live in peace and quietness and have his bottle and his whisky punch at night to himself.”

And so the debts accumulated, and there was not always ready money enough in the house to buy candles. But one way out was still open, for no Member of Parliament could be arrested for debt; an election fell handy, and freeholders were in great request, not all of whom could safely swear that they had been on the ground where their alleged freeholds lay.

“Now, Sir Condry, being tender of the consciences of those that had not been on the ground, sent out for a couple of cleavefuls of the sods of his farm of Gulteeshinnagh, and as the sods came into town, he set each man upon his sod, and so these, ever after, could fairly swear they had been upon the ground. He gained the day by this piece of honesty.”

A volume could be written on that passage as illustrating the Irish attitude to law, produced by the penal system. But it carries its own comment. The story goes on to show how with ingenious honesty Jason Quirk laboured to supplant his employer in the possession of house and land, while Sir Condry was good-humouredly drinking himself to death. Whether Jason Quirk got the lands or no, is left among law's uncertainties. Only one thing is clearly indicated: that the order of things which prevailed in Castle Rackrent under successive owners of the old school could not last for long; and Miss Edgeworth's later stories, *Ennui* and *The Absentee*, show that after the Union a somewhat different order prevailed, but no more durable

The new type of landlord lived in England and spent in England the rents which were raised for him by agents who held all the landlord's power, and often abused it tyrannously and shamelessly. Maria Edgeworth's sense of justice was revolted by such instances. She wanted to see, and she wrote books to bring about, an Ireland in which landlords should live on their estates, and administer their properties with justice and benignity, an Ireland which could be made into a country almost like the England which she knew, and Thomas Moore knew, surrounding the Lansdowne mansion of Bowood.

But as for entering into the national aspirations of Ireland, or realizing that Ireland had a significant history of its own out of which a new history should develop, she would have been incapable of such flights. At the end of *Castle Rackrent* when Thady has said his last word, a page is added where a very different voice speaks. We are told that the "editor" lays Thady's tale "before the English reader as a specimen of manners and characters which are perhaps unknown in England", and then follows philosophical comment.

"It is a problem of difficult solution to determine whether a Union will hasten or retard the melioration of this country. The few gentlemen of education who now reside in this country will resort to England, they are few, but they are in nothing inferior to men of the same rank in Great Britain. The best that can happen will be the introduction of British manufacturers in their places."

I like to think—indeed I have no doubt—that Mr Edgeworth, not Maria, wrote these lines. But she let him write them, and probably she accepted them cordially. That is why in Irish literature Thomas Moore, who had a

real nationalism, is more significant than Maria Edgeworth in the history of Irish literature, though in the history of the English novel, *Castle Rackrent* ranks higher than even the *Irish Melodies* in the history of English lyrical poetry.

For it may be claimed, I think, that if she did not introduce "local colour" into fiction, she first refined the use of it. The supreme argument for this view is to be found in the "Postscript which ought to have been a Preface," at the end of *Waverley*. "It has been my object," Sir Walter writes, "to describe these persons" (the Lowland Scottish gentlemen and the subordinate characters) "not by a caricatured and exaggerated use of the national dialect, but by their habits, manners, and feelings: so as in some distant degree to emulate the admirable Irish portraits drawn by Miss Edgeworth."

Yet as an Irish literature written in English by native Irishmen began to develop, we find one aspiration repeatedly expressed: Ireland was looking for its Walter Scott. It needed more than Maria Edgeworth could give, wholly apart from the greater or lesser degree of creative genius. Scott was in entire sympathy with all that was Scotland. Jacobite by instinct, he could sympathize with Covenanter almost as with Cavalier, because the Covenanter was a natural expression of Scotland. Maria Edgeworth knew and loved the Irish, but no one could say that she was in full national sympathy with Ireland, or even with Ireland's right to be considered a nation.

## CHAPTER V

### MISS EDGEWORTH'S SUCCESSORS

BEFORE steam transport, Edinburgh and Dublin were a longer journey from London than New York is to-day, and were naturally much more distinct in character than they became when the distance could be covered in a day. Yet the cultivated, well-to-do class in both capitals belonged to the same social order, and members of it, when they wrote, wrote in the main for London readers. Miss Edgeworth was born into this class, Moore was admitted to it, and they were published in London.

But inevitably in cities so distant, each centre had its own fugitive literature addressed to its local public—its own journals and magazines. These swarmed in Dublin, as indeed they still do, and through the medium of these, Irish works of a very different type from that represented by Moore and Miss Edgeworth began to get a hearing.

Something similar could be seen in Edinburgh, Hogg, the Ettrick shepherd, was a pillar of *Blackwood's Magazine*. But Hogg, peasant though he was, continued the tradition of a literature to which peasant and noble had contributed for five hundred years, and which in his lifetime had been carried to its supreme height by an Ayrshire ploughman. The men who in Ireland were the counterparts of Hogg or of Hogg's contemporary (and Barrie's forerunner) John Galt had no such literary tradition. The literature of the Gaelic people was in its own language. If Irish peasants were represented speaking English, they must be represented

speaking ignorantly. But Scott's Lowlanders, or Gals, speak the distinct and cultivated tongue of which Burns was the supreme master.

Ireland's native writers of last century knew English in one sense perfectly, just as Burns did. But it was not in their blood and bones. Burns is not only one of the greatest lyric poets, but also among the most technically accomplished; yet if Burns had left only what he wrote in standard English, his name would hardly have survived. His native tongue was Scots. Language is not merely a mechanical instrument of expressing disembodied thoughts, it has infinite colours and tones, and the perception of them is acquired by heredity. The Irishmen who wrote then of Ireland had to write of it in a language which certainly was not yet the language of their parent stock. Three names stand out—Carleton, Banim, and Griffin; and of these the most important and most significant is William Carleton, for he came not only of native Irish race, but of Irish-speaking peasants. The name is the anglicized form of O'Carolan. His mother was a Kelly.

He was born in 1794, on the borders of Tyrone and Monaghan, in a district where the most distressing features of Irish life were savagely accentuated; for here the divisions of race and religion were not merely between the landlord class and the tenantry. The soil was not only owned by Protestants but in part occupied by them; and the peasantry were divided into two camps, each having its own oath-bound association, ready to administer its own conception of justice. Faction fighting was rampant everywhere in the Ireland of that day; but here, in Ulster and the part of Ulster where numbers were most evenly balanced, it took on the character of a smouldering guerilla war between Orangemen and Ribbonmen.

William Carleton was the youngest child by five years—in a family of fourteen children. His father was, by the

standard of his times, a moderately well-to-do farmer, he spoke English as fluently as he spoke Irish, and he had, what is still to be met with among peasant "shanachys," a marvellous verbal memory "As a narrator of old tales, legends, and historical anecdotes," his son writes, he was "unrivalled and his stock of them inexhaustible. What rendered this of such peculiar advantage to me as a literary man was that I heard them as often, if not oftener, in the Irish language as in the English, a circumstance which enabled me to transfer the genius, the idiomatic peculiarity and conversational spirit of the one language into the other, precisely as the people themselves do in their dialogues, whenever the heart or the imagination happens to be moved by the darker or the better passions."

That sentence, from the unfinished autobiography which was the last of Carleton's writings, seems of capital importance. Carleton attempted instinctively what Synge, nearly a century later, was to do by study with a finished literary art, he tried to bring from one language into the other the form and colour of the Irish mind. The content of that mind, Irish feeling and Irish thought, Ireland's sense of her own past and hopes for her future could be expressed, and were expressed, in English far better by other pens than Carleton's. Neither Irish history nor Irish legend took hold on him, his interest was only in the life that lay about him, that he had taken part in with lusty vigour, and that could be turned to picturesque and popular account.

But music moved him, and his mother, who spoke Irish more easily than English, came of a family who had composed, he says, "several fine old Irish songs and airs, some in praise of a patron or a friend and others to celebrate rustic beauties."

Carleton showed exceptional quickness as a scholar, though schooling was hard to come by, and he had practically no access to books. But his parents gave him every

chance they could, and set him apart for learning—to make a priest. But the vocation was lacking, and if one can accept his own account, the scholar, although always dressed in black, and regarded as “the young priest,” led the countryside in athletics—leaping, weight-throwing, and dancing, to the general admiration. Upon one thing, however, he was resolute—he would not be a spade labourer; and until he was well over twenty he lived on his relations and his friends, evidently thinking it not only right but natural that his ambition should be assisted. This help was given him, as his own account makes clear, by people little better off than himself. That they gave it, and that he not only took it, but in his old age told gladly how gladly he took it, is a significant fact in the study of Irish literature.

William Carleton clearly thought that his pursuit of learning and his endeavour to rise out of "slavery" deserved support none the less, though he was not going to be a priest.

The best known among his *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry* is "The Poor Scholar," which, apart from its merit as literature, is a capital document on the surprising system by which boys from the poorer parts of Ireland set out to the richer land of Munster, where farmers could keep a schoolmaster among them able to teach the classics. The poor scholar got his board and lodging free in one of the farmhouses, helping the children of the house with their lessons. Money to pay the school fees and expenses of his journey was subscribed by the people of his parish—Protestant neighbours often adding their contribution. Carleton describes the whole with great fire and full knowledge, for he himself set out as a poor scholar, though before he had gone far on his journey his heart failed him and he came home.

But such learning as he got, he got in similar schools—and he learnt to read and write Latin fluently, and when he began to support himself, it was by teaching. His sketches of the Irish schoolmaster—they recur in several of his stories—show the class as pretentious and pedantic, talking an English stuffed with long words. In the eighteenth century their predecessors, probably no better instructed in the classics or mathematics, were, as has been shown, masters of the Irish tongue, transmitters of a formed Gaelic style. Those of Carleton's day, like Carleton himself, in most cases, might know Irish, but regarded English as the language of culture and used it as a matter of self-respect. In Scotland, the equivalents for them and their pupils had in the first place in their ears the traditional literature of their original Lowland tongue its lyrics and ballads, but more than that, they had as the very foundation of all instruction, the Bible translated into English at



the moment when English genius reached its highest literary expression Carleton cannot properly be called a self-educated man, he was given, and he grasped at, all the education that could have fitted him for the priesthood; but in the craft of literary expression he was without that subconscious preparation which comes of a man's familiarity with masterpieces in the language that he is to use. A Bible Christian has a formidable advantage when it comes to expressing either his thoughts or his feelings, and Carleton, though as his writings show he was truly educated in the teaching of Christianity, never got the cadences of the English Bible into his ear or on his tongue.—One strange thing about him is that though no one has expressed more perfectly the simple religious feeling of Catholic Ireland, his own fidelity was most dubious. After a series of makeshift scrapings through stray teaching jobs, he succeeded in getting work in Dublin, as a clerk in the office of the Sunday School Society. This was about 1825, in the year when O'Connell's agitation was at its height, and opponents of Catholic emancipation were busy as proselytizers.

The Sunday School Society was not the most active form of this, but some clergymen conducted a vigorous pamphleteering campaign, and the *Christian Examiner* was their organ. Carleton, now turned of thirty and married, was anxious to earn money, he had already tried his hand at essay writing, but the Reverend Cæsar Otway (himself a writer who is still readable) suggested that he should supply studies of Irish peasant life, to illustrate its superstitions. His first published work was a description of the pilgrimage to Lough Derg in County Donegal and the two days of fasting and other mortifications. Naturally, under these conditions, it was not written in a tone to please Catholics.

For the *Christian Examiner* Carleton continued to write from 1828 to 1831, and in the two last of these years also

for the *National Magazine*, said to have been started by students of Trinity College. In 1830 he published—in Dublin—his first book *Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry*. A second volume with the same title followed it in 1833, and contained "The Poor Scholar" and "Tubber Derg," which are generally counted his best work. Yet the longer story (making a full volume) of "Fardorogha the Miser" has much more remarkable power. This appeared first in the *Dublin University Magazine*, to which, from its foundation in 1833 Carleton was a frequent contributor, until 1842, when Lever became its editor. In the latter year *The Nation* newspaper was founded as the organ of Young Ireland, and this is a landmark in the history both of Irish literature and Irish politics.

Carleton was then close on fifty. His popularity was established not only in Ireland, but in England, yet Catholic and Nationalist Ireland looked askance at him, by reason of his contributions to the *Christian Examiner*, which with all their unwelcome criticism of the priesthood had been rissued in a volume as *Tales of Irish Life*. From 1842 onwards his friendship with the group whose organ was *The Nation* produced a marked change in the bent of his work, and his power of denunciation was now expended on bad landlords and agents. "Valentine McClutchy," a savagely propagandist story of this kind, had a great vogue, but the most popular by far of all his works was the novel *Willy Reilly*, published in 1850.

He lived on, still writing, till 1868. But essentially, as a writer, he belongs to the period before the Famine of 1846-48. His reputation was then fully made, as indeed is proved by the public movement to secure him a pension in 1847. This list of signatories to a memorial presented to the Lord-Lieutenant was headed by the Lord Chancellor and the Duke of Leinster, it included the Provost of Trinity College, the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, and

from Ulster Dr. Montgomery and Dr. Cooke, the two foremost Presbyterian divines. Noblemen, great names in the Orange order, figured along with Smith O'Brien and Gavan Duffy, both of whom were shortly to be on trial for high treason, and the pension of £200 was granted by Lord John Russell's government. But the most significant name of all was Maria Edgeworth, who wrote—not for publication, but for Carleton's eye—her admiration for "works which give with such masterly strokes and in such strong and vivid colour the pictures of our country's manners, her virtues and her vices, without ministering to party prejudice or exciting dangerous passions."

She wrote this after "Valentine McClutchy" had appeared. But then Miss Edgeworth herself had not been sparing in her censure of the Irish land system, and she was too reasonable a woman not to take it as right that Carleton should throughout be for the tenant as against the landlord and the agent and the process server. She counted it for virtue to him, doubtless that he denounced most vigorously the Ribbon lodges, and gave a picture of the way in which one villain could twist to his own personal ends a league formed to protect—or to revenge—the whole body.

The most notable thing about Carleton is that one feels him to be writing for Ireland, not for England. He is telling stories of his own people to a different class of Irishmen. Yet, even so, he feels it necessary to explain, as Maria Edgeworth did not explain in *Castle Rackrent*. What is worse, however, just because he feels himself to be addressing the class who have his people in their power, he is deplorably prone to harangue—especially on the Land Laws. "The Poor Scholar" is spoilt by the digression which describes how an absentee landlord was induced to look into his agent's doings. This change of heart is the poor

scholar's work, but we lose sight of the poor scholar for much too long. In "Tubber Derg" such digressions have more justification, since the whole is the history of a decent farmer family driven out to beg on the roads, a case only too common.

Readers of Carleton should remember that the long Napoleonic wars sent the price of food up prodigiously, and consequently Irish landlords could and did raise the rents, and raise their own scale of living. Then came depression after the war, but the Irish population had so multiplied that applicants swarmed for every farm. The margin was too narrow, and in 1822 famine came with a severity that is only not remembered because, a generation later, a greater scourge destroyed not thousands, but hundreds of thousands, leaving a land drained of its vitality. The Ireland which Carleton described was the Ireland of his youth—overcrowded, miserably poor, yet full of lusty life.

A novelist seeking for striking incident naturally dwelt on its lawlessness. Murder for revenge is a recurring incident in all these stories, so are frauds and injustices that breed murder. Where people had nothing to eat but potatoes and milk, and whisky cost three halfpence a glass (provided it paid no duty), poteen making was a great industry—often also a desperate resource for earning the rent. Secret alliances for this fitted in easily with the secret societies, and gangs used to defying the law were ready aids for abduction, a practice introduced by the landlord class and adopted by the poor. Duelling does not come into tales of the peasantry, but faction fighting supplies even darker colour.

Add to these the emotions of a race accustomed to give every feeling full vent in words, or wailings, or shouts of delight or despair and defiance—the strong impulses of a religion, cherished under every difficulty, yet mixed with many superstitious beliefs—and you have the ingredients

that Carleton and his rivals worked with. But none of them came as he did from the very soil, out of the most typical peasantry.

For the tenderness of his work one would turn above all to "The Poor Scholar" and to the last passage in "Tubber Derg." But nothing stands out with such original force as the study of the peasant miser in "Fardorogha," which, if the writer's art had matched his power of conception, might rank with Turgenev's "King Lear of the Steppes." And in that same story the character of the miser's wife deserves to be noted for its portraiture of what is best in the Christian religion as expressed through the person of a Catholic Irish peasant woman.

But the art is at every point sadly to seek. Carleton never filled a really large canvas, and even in his short tales he is always redundant. He encumbers the essential utterance with a burden of superfluous words. He was, more is the pity, a thoroughly uneducated writer. He had a strong power for visual imagery, when he describes a landscape, it is clearly present to the mind's eye; and he had a natural feeling for the rhythmic beauty of words. Many an ear has been haunted by the opening of his poem, "Sir Turlogh's Bride".

"The bride she bound her golden hair,  
Killeevy, oh, Killeevy."

But the effect is frittered away through a tedious procession of long stanzas. A few lines may be quoted also (from a poem published in *The Christian Examiner*) to illustrate the two-handed talent of this natural-born but untaught writer:

"As the white low mist the meadows kissed  
In the summer twilight's glow,  
And the otter splashed and the wild duck dashed  
In the sedgy lake below,

'Twas sweet to hear the silver bell  
 For the flocks on high Dunroe  
 From the rail's hoarse throat the ceaseless note  
 Would flit, now far, now nigh,  
 And the quavering hum of the snipe would come  
 Quick shooting from the sky "

Certainly the man who wrote these lines knew his countryside among the hills and little loughs of the Ulster border, and felt it in his heart

The other novelists need less attention John and Michael Banim were sons of a well-to-do shopkeeper in Kilkenny who dealt in sporting guns and fishing tackle John Banim, born in 1798, was writing romances and verses from his childhood, and as a boy in his teens saw and adored Tom Moore, acting in the Kilkenny Theatre No wonder he adored, since "Anacreon Moore" called him "a brother poet," and gave him a season-ticket for the plays At fifteen he decided to be an artist, studied for two years in the Academy attached to the Royal Dublin Society, and at eighteen set up as a teacher of drawing in Kilkenny Then, after a passionate and tragic love idyll, he gave up art and decided to try his fortune in Dublin as an author Finding poor sustenance there, he pushed across to London with a poem, "*Ossian's Paradise*," for which a publisher surprisingly was found Less surprisingly the publisher went bankrupt But Banim, not discouraged wrote a play, *Damon and Pythias*, and Macready as Damon with Charles Kemble as Pythias brought it out at Covent Garden With the money so gotten he went back to Kilkenny, paid his debts and discussed with his elder brother Michael the possibility of tales illustrating Irish life So began the project of *Tales of the O'Hara Family*—a joint work It began in 1823, before Carleton had published anything

John Banum went back to London, bringing a wife; and in London he met another Irish adventurer, carrying as his equipment a blank verse tragedy. This was Gerald Griffin, son of a moderately well-to-do business man in Limerick, who after failure in business was left with enough means to buy a pleasant house on the tidal Shannon. Here again was a precocious talent, and the lad was barely nineteen when he set out for London, without friends or resources—except some aid from his elder brother, then settled as a doctor near Adare.

Without Banum's help, Griffin must have gone under, but thanks to it and to his own energy he made shift with some miserable hack work at translating, and a job as reporter in Parliament—meanwhile hawking about his finished tragedy, *Agure*, and completing another, *Gisippus*—which was in fact acted by Macready, but not until after its author's death. His stay in London lasted from 1823 to 1827, when his brother persuaded him to return to County Limerick. Nothing that he wrote in this period has importance; but within that time his friend's success had opened a door. "Nobody knew anything of Banum till he published his 'O'Hara' tales, which are becoming more and more popular every day," Griffin wrote. The second series, published in 1826, was equally popular, and it is memorable that Banum sought to assist the younger man by asking him to contribute as one of the imaginary O'Hara family. Griffin did not accept, but followed on the same track with *Tales of the Munster Festivals*, which appeared in 1828 while he stayed with his brother at Pallas Kenry. In these surroundings he began his full-length novel, *The Collegians*—which was written under the encouragement due to the reception of his Munster tales. Finished hastily in London, it appeared in 1829, and in the next year he returned to the pleasant surroundings of his brother's home.

Banim, less fortunate, though perhaps more successful, had no such refuge open to him, he had a wife and children, and must live where he could best earn in the only way at his command. Even this was rendered impossible by failing health, and in 1829 he was ordered to France. By 1830, in his thirty-second year he wrote of himself as "a paralysed man walking with much difficulty," and two years later he was forced to appeal for public help. He claimed for himself that at twenty-five he was "known at least as a national novelist, even though of a humble order," and that since then he had written twenty successful novels and five successful dramas."

Help came in 1835, when he and his wife, also an invalid, returned to Ireland, a benefit performance was given for them at the Theatre Royal in Dublin, and at Kilkenny the novelist was welcomed with an address from the citizens, further, a pension of £150 a year helped through the remaining years of his crippled existence till it ended in 1842. Till the last, he and his brother contrived to issue in collaboration *Tales of the O'Hara Family*.

Gerald Griffin had died in 1840, but had gradually ceased to write or at least to publish, from a growing sense that desire for literary fame was not compatible with a truly religious life. For after a period of scepticism he had returned with fervour to his Catholic faith, and finally, in 1838, decided to enter a monastic life, but not one of contemplation. He joined the lay order of Christian Brothers founded for the purpose of educating the children of the poor. After two years' happy service with them, he caught typhus fever and died within a few days.

During this period of his life he abstained altogether from writing, and before he entered upon it, made a general destruction of his manuscripts. The best known of all his work, the song "Eileen Aroon," was recovered from some scraps overlooked. Oddly enough, however,



he left the drama *Gisippus* in his brother's care, and it was performed at Drury Lane in February 1842, with great applause, Macready and Helen Faucit playing the chief parts

It is clear that of these men the Banims were the pioneers, and both they and Griffin anticipated Carleton. The idea of producing from Irish sources of inspiration something like what Scott had drawn from Scotland, was John Banim's, but his brother Michael actually wrote *Crohoore of the Billhook*, much the most powerful of the "O'Hara" tales. Still, when the professional man of letters died, the home-keeping brother wrote no more, but settled down to be postmaster at Kilkenny. All the work of the Banims and all that of Gerald Griffin lies before the literary movement connected with *The Nation*: and the Ireland of which they wrote had not been swept by the famine

But the writers of *The Nation* accepted *The Collegians* as the outstanding Irish novel. Its life was prolonged at least till the close of the century by Dion Bouccicault's dramatized version, *The Colleen Bawn*. To-day it is not easily read; certain scenes have force (recalling the Brontës), but it degenerates constantly into hysterical violence, and for the most part Griffin is describing the manners of people among whom he had not lived—the Irish landlord class. Eily O'Connor, the lovely daughter of the ropemaker at Garryowen, is a living and most pathetic figure; but the peasant characters are drawn with exaggeration, except one who plays a very small part, Myles na Coppaleen, the pony dealer from Killarney. But if none of Griffin's prose wears well, nearly all the songs scattered through this book in profusion are full of life, merry or mournful.

Broadly speaking, in these novelists of purely Irish stock we get the picture of a country where transitions

are violent, and contrast savagely accumulated where life is held cheap, yet where affections are of passionate intensity, where the tragic and the ludicrous jostle each other. Yet the darker strain predominates whether in "The Poor Scholar" or "Fardorougha," in *Crohoore of the Billhook*, or in *The Collegians*, there is far more to shock and terrify than to amuse—though in all these books humour is present almost as an obligatory element. That is Ireland of the days before the famine, seen through Irish eyes, and it cannot be said that the English public was indifferent to the merits of the picture. All these men were praised—Banim and Carleton were pensioned—by Englishmen in power. Yet what they offered was not what England wanted from an Irish novelist. England wanted to be made to laugh. It got what it wanted from a very similar picture, presented, but with a very different emphasis, in the work of these men's contemporary Charles Lever, who throughout the whole Victorian period passed as the representative Irish novelist.

Charles Lever was Irish only as Swift was, that is to say, he was born and bred in Ireland, but born of English parents. His father was a building contractor, who by government influence got the contract for the Dublin Custom House—a very noble piece of work to be connected with. Charles, his second son, was born in 1806 and was going joyously through Trinity while Griffin and Banim were struggling and starving in London. His elder brother took orders, and was curate at Portumna on Lough Derg where Charles spent many vacations, and so drew his impressions of Irish country life outside Dublin from the country of the Galway Blazers. He was a handsome high-spirited youth with a passion for practical joking and lived gloriously and uproariously in college as a medical student. Having got his qualification he was prompted by the spirit of adventure to go out as surgeon on an emigrant ship

bound for Quebec, and spent the summer of 1829 in wanderings, even among the Indian tribes. According to his own story, he was adopted into a tribe and had to escape by stealth. After his return, he spent a period at the University of Göttingen, and explored Germany before he returned to Dublin to walk the hospitals, and establish a social club in rivalry of the German *Bundesschaft*. At this time he began contributing to the local magazines.

In 1832, when cholera broke out, the young doctor was sent down to cope with it in West Clare, and had his headquarters in Kilrush, where there was a kind of informal club in which he heard a vast deal of anecdote of Irish life west of the Shannon. Here also he met extreme typical examples of the Irish parish priest, as seen in general society.

From Clare his profession took him to the most opposite part of Ireland; for he became dispensary doctor in Portstewart, on the borders of Derry and Antrim, some ten miles from the Giant's Causeway. Here the people to whom he must minister were Ulster Protestants, speaking with a Scottish accent and in a Scottish dialect. Living near by was W. H. Maxwell, a sporting clergyman, whose duties in County Mayo were largely left to a curate and the two made friends. Maxwell had already written *Captain Blake of the Rifles*. The young doctor was noted for his talk, a shy child, son of the rector of Portstewart, who generally fled before visitors, used to creep into the room when he heard that Dr. Lever was there, telling story after story. Presently the friendship with Maxwell led to a visit to Maxwell's parish in County Mayo, and each man encouraged the other. Maxwell began to write his *Wild Sports of the West*; Lever began to send to the *Dublin University Magazine* a loosely connected string of stories, which had for their title, "The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer."

This magazine had been started in 1833 by six Trinity

College men, one of whom was Isaac Butt, and Butt was editor when the first number of "Lorrequer" appeared in February 1837

Gerald Griffin's career was finished, Banim was broken in health, but Carleton, in the height of his powers, was at the same time contributing to this Dublin equivalent of *Blackwood*. Lever, still anonymous, began to find "Harry Lorrequer" much talked of, also, he began to feel life at Portstewart tedious. In 1837 he took the step of transferring himself with his wife and children to Brussels, where he could count on backing from Sir Hamilton Seymour, who had been Castlereagh's private secretary, and was then Minister at Brussels. And since the Minister long afterwards described Charles Lever as "one of the most agreeable among the four or five most agreeable men he ever fell in with," and wondered whether he did not "shine even more in conversation than in writing," it is certain that this young Irish doctor had, socially speaking, a brilliant life in Brussels.

Meanwhile "Lorrequer" went on, not planned as a continuous story, but simply as a number of scenes in the life of an exuberant young English subaltern, whose regimental duty had brought him to Ireland, and who had been captured by the humours and adventures of that country. It did not even appear regularly, and the last instalment was published early in 1840. But the same number announced that in the next would be found the beginning of "Charles O'Malley, the Irish Dragoon" by "Harry Lorrequer," who was now recognized as indispensable to the magazine. Not the diversions of a soldier in peace time but war was now the theme, and the Peninsular campaign, on which Lever had embarked his hero, offered splendid material. He carried the same rattling spirits into serious narrative as into broad farce, and his popularity was established while he was still anonymous. The author's name was not dis-

closed until "Jack Hinton" was finished, and by this time, in 1842, Lever had given up medicine and accepted a handsome income as editor of *The Dublin University Magazine*. A fine old house at Templeogue, five miles from the centre of Dublin, and facing across the little river Dodder to the mountains, now became his home. Here he lived with the profuse hospitality which was the Irish characteristic that most appealed to him, and as his books multiplied, he came to be considered as the one Irish novelist, for no other writer on Irish subjects approached his popularity outside Ireland.

It would be absurd to say that he did not know Ireland; born and bred in Dublin, married to an Irish wife, he had spent several years as a doctor in typical Irish countrysides; and his novels are there to witness that he delighted in Ireland, as many an Englishman, made Irish by adoption, has done since. It is even true that he identified himself with Ireland—naturally enough, with one section of it, the landowning class. He accepted the Irish reverence and affection for "the old stock," and one may even say that for him it added to their picturesqueness if the stock was Catholic. If he made no very clear distinction between Gael and Norman, that is natural, because for him the extreme characteristic expression of Irish life was to be found in Connaught, and few people remember that Burke or Blake, for instance, is a Norman-English name. In fact, for Charles Lever, Irish history began with Grattan's Parliament, and like many another good Unionist he kept all his respect for those who opposed the Union, and had a fine contempt for its bribed supporters. None the less, he was by all his instincts for the English connection, and instinctively regarded those of the Catholic Irish who were not peasants as vulgar persons seeking to push their way into civilized society.

Lever had left his editorship before the famine, he

only remained three years in Dublin. During that time his own work did not change its character. But it was not possible for any intelligent man to know Ireland before the famine and after it without showing the mark of those years. Between 1842 and 1845 Ireland was heading for a calamity as great as ever fell on any country, and it struck both the main classes, landlord and tenant with ruinous force. Lever's later work has value to-day only because of his sympathy with a landlord class that had been splendid in prodigality, and went down into picturesque ruin.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE YOUNG IRELAND MOVEMENT

IN the period before the famine, when Carleton and Lever begun to write, there was a flush of hectic life in the Irish people. Dublin in 1840 was the capital of a population that had reached eight millions, and was rapidly increasing. A terrible proportion of these—not less than four millions—were miserably poor, but they were labourers producing wealth for somebody, and there was wealth in the capital. On the other hand, the people, poor as they were, were lifted by a national aspiration. In 1829 Catholic Emancipation had been carried after a vast movement, behind which lay the threat of physical force. O'Connell, the incarnation of this impulse, was pressing now for Repeal of the Union—in other words, for restoration of self-government to Ireland on a basis which should no longer limit power to the Protestant minority; and his words, delivered to immense assemblies, reached Ireland almost as Mussolini's are carried on the air to-day through Italy. He had indeed deliberately encouraged the native Irish to discard their ancient language, holding that the preservation of it for daily use was too heavy a handicap on a people in every way ill equipped; but he urged on them a sense of their ancient inheritance; he fostered racial consciousness. If Moore had a popularity hardly second to O'Connell's, it was because in his songs Ireland found expression for this national pride in the language that O'Connell had taught them to adopt.

At the same time Dublin was the centre of a group of scholars engaged on the effort to make accessible what might be called the title deeds of this racial consciousness. In this work of resuscitation Protestant and Catholic of both the racial stocks joined hands. Trinity College played its part through its librarian James Henthorn Todd but even more through its alumni—noted among whom was the brilliant oculist William Wilde. Wilde's concern was less with written documents than with the study of ancient monuments and treasures of ancient native Irish art. He brought the Cross of Cong into the national collection.

Trace of all these activities can be found in the Irish magazine to which Lever brought the resources of his popular talent. The *Dublin University Magazine* although violently opposed to the Repeal movement did its best to illustrate and adorn the distinctive life of Ireland. Under the guidance of Isaac Butt—then a brilliant Tory advocate and O'Connell's chief opponent—it was publishing Carleton's *Fardorogha* when *Lorrequer* began and in these same years we find in its pages early work of the two men who were to give Ireland in the English language a poetry more vigorous than Moore's and by far more closely inspired with the distinctive Irish tradition. It meant a great deal that in Dublin the novelists Lever and Carleton and the poets Ferguson and Mangan should have access to local periodicals in which their work could appear and by which even a poet could at least make shift to live. From 1842 onwards—the year in which Lever became editor of the magazine—another publication very different in tendency offered a new opening to Irish literary talent. But the importance of the Young Ireland movement and of its organ *The Nation* in the spread of Ireland's race consciousness has been so fully recognized that other tendencies not less vital have been overlooked. A leading part was



played by men who were not, politically, Irish Nationalists. For literary history the *Dublin University Magazine* is hardly less significant than *The Nation*. Both the poets to whom I have referred helped and were helped by the Tory organ before the Nationalist one came into being.

So early as 1834 Samuel Ferguson, a descendant of Scottish settlers who had become landed gentry in County Antrim, was contributing to the magazine. He was then a young barrister of three-and-twenty, and already work of his, both in prose and verse, had appeared in *Blackwood*. His spirited ballad, "The Forging of the Anchor," holds its place in Irish literature, because it is his work. But, as an American critic, A. M. Williams, has written in a preface to Ferguson's *Lays of the Western Gael*, "the chief labour and success of his literary life were in the interpretation of Celtic history and poetry and spirit, and were by him so regarded." This pious task began when he published his rendering of *A Song for the Clans of Wicklow*, written about 1580, by the bard of the O'Byrnes. Here is a single verse, from the pages of that Tory periodical :

"'Twas the want of right command,  
Not the lack of heart and hand,  
Left your hills and plains to-day  
'Neath the strong Clan Saxon's sway."

And here are two from the "Lament over the Ruins of the Abbey of Timoleague," written in Irish by John Collins (or O'Cualan), who died in 1816, some years after Ferguson was born -

"Holy house of ivied gables,  
That was once the country's pride,  
Houseless now in weary wandering  
Roam your inmates far and wide.

Oh ! the hardship oh ! the hatred,  
 Tyranny and cruel war  
 Persecution and oppression,  
 That have left you as you are "

Better known is his version of " The Fair Hills of Ireland," an eighteenth-century lyric

" A plenteous place is Ireland for hospitable cheer,  
*Uileacán dubh* O !  
 Where the wholesome fruit is bursting from the yellow  
 barley ear ,  
 There is honey in the trees where her misty vales expand,  
 And her forest paths, in summer, are by falling waters  
 fanned ,  
 There is dew at high noontide there, and springs in the  
 yellow sand  
 On the fair hills of holy Ireland "

In 1836 appeared the " Fairy Thorn " a ballad of his own devising, and also (very different in quality) the most spirited lay " Willy Gilliland," in which the hero is an exiled Covenanter, hunted on the Antrim hills and achieving his revenge at the gate of Carrickfergus Castle. Later comes the series of *Hibernian Nights Entertainments*, prose and verse mingled, in which was to be found I think the first telling in English verse of the saga of Deirdre and the Sons of Usnach. None of this work represents Ferguson at his best, and none of his poetry appeared in book form until 1864 thirty years after he first contributed to the *University Magazine*. His work as a whole must therefore be considered later, but from his early manhood this Ulster Protestant was at work making in English an Irish poetry from Irish sources—interpreting the history and the spirit of Ireland. His mature talent built strongly on foundations

then laid. But Irish was to Ferguson an acquired language which he could read, not use for speech.

Nothing could be more unlike this sober, discreet, and scholarly Protestant lawyer than the only other Irish poet of that age who can be ranked with him. Readers of those books which have made a vision of Dublin life familiar to half Europe will recognize in Clarence Mangan a Dubliner who might have been set before us by James Joyce. Carleton says that up to his day Dublin was full of "hedge schools"—teaching establishments, each of which was a poor scholar's venture. The poet's father, James Mangan (properly O'Mongan—it is a Clare name), came up from Shanagolden in County Limerick, as Carleton had come from the borders of Tyrone, to find a living thus; he advanced himself in the world by marrying Catherine Smith, who had inherited a grocery shop in what was then Fishamble Street, at the heart of old Dublin, near St. Patrick's Cathedral. Their eldest child, christened also James Mangan, was born in 1803. The grocery shop became a public-house, the elder Mangan was too free-handed with his wares, and by the time his boy was fifteen the family was indigent. James the younger, who had got tolerable schooling, and was clever with his books and his pen, had to become their breadwinner, copying law papers in a solicitor's office. We have his own word for it that he hated the drudgery, and was miserable in coarse company, but the trade he had learnt gave him a living till he was three-and-thirty, at a wage of about thirty shillings a week.

From the time he was fifteen, he had been writing verses for the poet's corner in almanacs over half a dozen signatures; also he read endlessly, and mastered three or four languages. Sickly and solitary, wilfully eccentric in appearance, he haunted the Dublin bookstalls. By 1832, after some connection with a mosquito journal called *The*

*Comet*, he began contributing to the *Dublin Penny Journal*, a paper founded by a group of men interested in Irish antiquities. In this way he became acquainted with Petrie and O'Donovan, who knew him by the name Clarence which he had assumed.

None of this early work has any importance, but it shows him already possessed of an uncanny facility with rhyme and of a varying command of rhythm. Much of it is elaborately fictitious, after the fashion of that time, and, according to the same fashion, much preoccupied with rum punch. When precisely he became habitually a drunkard, and when opium was added to the other way of release, cannot be ascertained, but certain it is that he went early on the same way as the writer whom he most resembles—Edgar Allan Poe.

From 1834 onwards he was contributing regularly to the *University Magazine* and could give up law scrivenering. But about 1838 Petrie got him work as a copyist in the historical department of the newly established Ordnance Survey. This supplemented his literary earnings, most of which were translations from the German, strung together by prose comment in an "*Anthologia Germanica*." Then came a series of *Litteræ Orientales*, and among his alleged renderings from the Arabic comes (in the same volume with "*Harry Lorrequer*") his "*Time of the Barmecides*." Its swinging chant has preserved it.

"My eyes are filmed, my beard is grey,  
 I am bowed with the weight of years;  
 I would I were stretched in my bed of clay  
 With my long-lost youth's compeers!<sup>1</sup>  
 For back to the past, though the thought brings woe,  
 My memory ever glides—  
 To the old, old time, long, long ago,  
 The time of the Barmecides!<sup>1</sup>

To the old, old time, long, long ago,  
The time of the Barmecides ! ”

But far better than this, and more characteristic in its ingenuity, is the song which, in his *Anthologia*, he published as a translation from the German of Ruckert—though Ruckert’s only contribution to it is the refrain “ gone in the wind ” .

“ Solomon ! where is thy throne ? It is gone in the wind.  
Babylon ! where is thy might ? It is gone in the wind  
Like the swift shadows of Noon, like the dreams of the  
Blind,  
Vanish the glories and pomps of the earth in the wind ”

Eight more stanzas follow, all with the same wailing rhyme. Except Poe, no one, I think, has done anything like it ; and no one will deny its power to haunt the mind. With it, and above it, stand two other poems, entirely Mangan’s own. One is the terrible imagination of a Siberia frozen, desert and desolate :

“ Nothing blooms of green or soft,  
But the snowpeaks rise aloft  
And the gaunt ice-blocks.

“ And the exile there  
Is one with those ;  
They are part, and he is part,  
For the sands are in his heart,  
And the killing snows

“ Therefore in those wastes  
None curse the Czar.”

The other is the lament for himself, called "The Nameless One," where the hysterical vehemence of his accusation against others is redeemed by the sincerity of its close :

" And he fell far through that pit abysmal,  
The gulf and grave of Maginn and Burns,  
And pawned his soul for the Devil's dismal  
Stock of returns,

" But yet redeemed it in days of darkness,  
And shapes and signs of the final wrath,  
When death, in hideous and ghastly starkness,  
Stood in his path

" And lives he still, then ? Yes ! Old and hoary  
At thirty-nine, from despair and woe,  
He lives, enduring what future story  
Will never know

" Him grant a grave to, ye pitying noble,  
Deep in your bosoms There let him dwell !  
He, too, had tears for all souls in trouble,  
Here and in hell "

That soul, surely, is close of kin to Stephen Dedalus, in Joyce's *Ulysses*, and the poem will never be forgotten so long as those other things are remembered by which Mangan holds his rank in Irish literature. These are the "Visions," adapted from the Irish, on which Petrie and O'Curry set him to work. They appeared first in the *Irish Penny Journal*, Mangan, with his usual love of mystification, prefaced them by prose comment, which would imply that he read Irish as easily as German, but in fact he worked upon translations furnished by O'Curry. One of the poems is semi-comic, a satire on the Woman of

"Three Cows," and here Mangan stuck close to his original, but in the "Lament for the Princes of Tyrone and Tyrconnell" he renders not the words but the spirit of the song. So it was in all the poems on which his fame rests notably in his version of the bard O'Hussey's Ode to the Maguire, lord of Fermanagh—which has the special interest that here Mangan worked from a prose rendering, published by Ferguson in the *Dublin University Magazine* in 1834. I give the first verse and the last of this imaginative address to the warrior abroad on foray.

"Where is my Chief, my Master, this bleak night, *mav-  
rone* !

Oh, cold, cold, miserably cold, is this bleak night for  
Hugh ;

Its showery, arrowy, speary sleet pierceth one through  
and through—

Pierceth one to the very bone

Hugh marched forth to the fight—I grieved to see him so  
depart ,

And lo ! to-night he wanders frozen, rain-drenched,  
sad, betrayed—

But the memory of the lime-white mansions his right  
hand hath laid

In ashes warms the hero's heart."

Here Mangan is assimilating the movement of his verse to the dragging Irish rhythm. But in the poem by which above all he is best known—which is indeed among Ireland's scriptures—he makes his own rhythms, to sing of Ireland as "The Dark Rosaleen." Here again it was Ferguson, who by an article in the magazine had provided the prose version which set Mangan's genius to work, but here is no question of translation. The Gaelic poet wrote of his loves for

Ireland and devotion to Ireland as if she were an ordinary sweetheart. Mangan lifted her into a mystical virgin goddess with "holy, delicate, white hands", and the mixture of passionate religious devotion and passionate national feeling has never been so well expressed.

Thus Mangan was guided towards native Irish sources by enthusiasts for literature rather than for politics, and most of his verse was published in a periodical that had no Nationalist bias. Yet "The Dark Rosaleen" appeared in the journal which from 1842 onward focussed in itself the vehement intellectual life of a reviving Ireland.

After the winning of Catholic emancipation the national movement had gradually become lethargic but new blood was infused into it. Two young barristers, who had each in turn been president of the Trinity College Historical Society, got control of a paper called *The Morning Register*. These were Thomas Osborne Davis, son of an English army surgeon who, after marrying an Irish lady—Protestant like himself—settled at Mallow in County Cork, and John Blake Dillon, whose father had established a successful shop at a crossroads in County Mayo. These two in their paper began to discuss, instead of jobs or concessions which might be got for Catholics from a Whig government, the possibility of reviving a national spirit among Irish Protestants and creating a united nation. Charles Gavan Duffy, born in County Monaghan, who had first gone to Belfast as editor of a Catholic paper, returning to Dublin in 1841, found that Davis and Dillon had abandoned their venture. He proposed the project of a new weekly journal which they three should own and write. It was decided on the suggestion of Davis, to call it *The Nation*. Duffy, by his experience of press-work, was indicated as editor, and if the test of a journalist's ability be his power to interpret, expound, and diffuse a political creed, he has had few equals.



Yet the policy was already outlined by the other two. Dillon, coming from a part of the country where the tenants were most miserable, naturally stressed the necessity of reform in land tenure, Davis dwelt rather on the development of a national consciousness and national energy. As Duffy puts it in his *Young Ireland*—"Davis desired a national existence for Ireland that an old historic state might be raised from the dust, and a sceptre placed in her hand, that she might become the mother of a brave and self-reliant race. Dillon desired a national existence primarily to get rid of social degradation and suffering, which it wrung his heart to witness without being able to relieve."

The motto chosen for *The Nation* defined its purpose "To create and foster public opinion in Ireland and make it racy of the soil." Yet it might be said that its first true end was to develop in the Irish people a forgotten pride. Episodes in Irish history were recounted in a spirited prose, but the most powerful weapon in *The Nation's* armoury proved to be ringing popular verse, for which Scott, Campbell and Macaulay afforded the models.

Both Davis and Duffy wrote such ballads with fierce vigour; yet they did not write alone. Within a year a collection of these verses, issued as *The Spirit of the Nation*, included work of a dozen writers; and one which has attained the widest popularity of all came from a Trinity College student, then quite unknown, but afterwards a chief glory of his university. Yet John Kells Ingram, when his work in scholarship and in economic science is forgotten, will be remembered for his lyric, "The Memory of the Dead." One verse of it—and every verse has been sung or recited a thousand times—gives the key to all this literature:

"They rose in dark and evil days  
To right their native land;

They kindled here a living blaze  
 That nothing shall withstand  
 Alas ! that Might can vanquish Right—  
*They fell, and passed away ,*  
 But true men, like you men,  
 Are plenty here to-day ”

Set beside that Davis's " Song for 12th July 1843 " :

“ Come ! pledge ag un thy heart and hand—  
 One grasp that ne'er shall sever ,  
 Our watchword be—' Our native land ! '  
 Our motto—' Love for ever ! '  
 And let the Orange lily be  
*Thy badge, my patriot-brother—*  
 The everlasting Green for *me* ,  
 And we for one another ”

Thus from John O'Hagan's " *Ourselves Alone* " .

“ The work that should to-day be wrought,  
 Defer not till to-morrow ,  
 The help that should within be sought,  
 Scorn from without to borrow  
 Old maxims these—yet stout and true—  
 They speak in trumpet tone,  
 To do at once what is to do,  
 And trust ' OURSELVES ALONE ' ”

And this again from " *The Munster War-Song,*" by Richard Dalton Williams .

“ Ay ! the foemen are flying, but vainly they fly—  
 Revenge with the fleetness of lightning can vie ,  
 And the septs of the mountains spring up from each rock  
 And rush down the ravines like wolves on the flock

" And who shall pass over the stormy Shieve Bloom,  
To tell the pale Saxon of tyranny's doom,  
When, like tigers from ambush, our fierce mountaineers  
Leap along from the crags with their death-dealing spears "

" They came with high boasting to bind us as slaves,  
But the glen and the torrent have yawned on their graves.  
From the gloomy Ardfinnan to wild Temple Mor—  
From the Suir to the Shannon—is red with their gore "

These examples will give a sense of the literature on which, even more than on Moore's *Melodies*, the young of Ireland were nourished for the next fifty years. Verse of this kind may abound in enthusiasm and practical energy, but it passes too easily into bombast, it lies far too near declamation to be poetry, and it adopts facile and mechanical rhythms. These writers had not, like Moore, to complain how hard it was to make their words fit with Irish music. They had lost the distinctively Irish note, and though their sentiments were the sentiments of patriotic Irishmen, they express them at the best in the manner of Lord Macaulay.

It was only Mangan, formed in another school, who contributed to *The Nation* a poem of high and lasting excellence, his "Dark Rosaleen"; and even Mangan, in other verses printed by *The Nation*, was again and again caught by the prevailing rhetoric. Davis has left some verse which shows that he might have been a poet, and not merely a propagandist using verse as his medium, but the three years which followed the founding of *The Nation* were spent in the clash and turmoil of political agitation too noisy for poetry to be heard. Yet it is to be noted that in all the brilliant group of men, Davis, and only Davis, son of the English doctor, insisted on the need to study the Gaelic language; while Catholics with such names as

MacNevin headed (in MacNevin's phrase) "a new insurrection of the bards" against the attempt to bring back even the native spelling of place names

In short, so far as poetry was concerned, the attempt to create an Irish national ballad literature led Ireland full cry down the wrong road. Whatever preached insurgent nationalism was regarded as more fully Irish, more national than all the quieter kinds of song. But no one should undervalue the service rendered by this group of writers, in prose or verse—and it was the verse that most took hold—to the Irish people. They quickened intellectual life and freedom throughout the country, when such an impulse was sorely needed. O'Connell's movement had been conducted through the priests—necessarily, for peasant Ireland had no other leaders available. Now, about 1845, France stood to Europe for the championship of liberty, but when O'Connell was young, France had meant to Europe what Russia meant after the world war. He himself, a Catholic student at St Omer, had fled from Revolutionary France at war with the Church, and for many decades after that, whatever could be called Liberalism was suspect to the priesthood. *The Nation* was suspect, not only because the leading spirit was a Protestant, but because in the name of nationalism it denounced the sectarian spirit, and though O'Connell at first welcomed these young allies, a cleavage soon declared itself. Ireland was taught by the new writers to think for itself, to act for itself, even in defiance of its clergy. Yet certain priests were from the first closely associated with this national literature, which refused to accept dictation either from the bishops or from O'Connell himself, and was therefore soon denounced as unorthodox. Difficulties had begun even before the death of Davis in 1845, they grew worse after it, O'Connell's failing health, the awful tragedy of famine from 1846 onward, all helped to bring about a break between Old Ireland and

Young Ireland. The literary movement became more and more definitely a revolt of the Left Wing; and as despair strengthened the appeal of revolutionary counsels, the Left Wing itself became divided.

At the head of the extremists was the ablest writer of all that the movement produced—John Mitchel, a solicitor from Newry, Unitarian by creed. He had begun to write for *The Nation* and for its allied Library of works on Irish history just before the death of Davis. After Davis was gone, this new man took his place as assistant to Duffy; but his most remarkable writing was only done after he had seceded from Duffy's paper and founded *The United Irishman*, which preached a general strike against rents, and an appeal to sheer physical force.

The line of cleavage had developed on an abstract assertion of the right to armed revolt. Old Ireland, headed by O'Connell and the bishops, insisted that all resistance must stop short of bloodshed. Young Ireland's view, expressed in a famous speech by Thomas Francis Meagher, refused to "abhor the sword and stigmatize the sword." Yet the bulk even of Young Ireland held back from a hopeless struggle till 1848, when the contagion of revolution spread over all Europe. William Smith O'Brien, a rich landlord belonging to the family which had ruled in south-west Ireland for many centuries, headed the hopeless rising on a point of honour, and with others incurred sentence of death, which was modified to transportation. The whole group was broken up: Mitchel and Meagher went, like O'Brien, to Australia as convicts; Duffy, who escaped sentence by a disagreement of the jury, continued active in Ireland, but after a few years went into voluntary exile and became one of Australia's first statesmen. Some who escaped sentence settled down into ordinary civil life at home; but other leading spirits made their way to North America, where already the emigration from a famine-

stricken land began to create a new Ireland beyond the seas. Puritan Boston was flooded with Catholic Irish, and one of the ablest of *The Nation's* poets, Thomas D'Arcy McGee, who escaped in 1848 with a price on his head, became editor of *The Boston Pilot*. Through the rest of that century this paper preserved much of *The Nation's* literary tradition when it had disappeared from the Irish Nationalist Press. In this latter period its editor was another escaped rebel, John Boyle O'Reilly, a Fenian from County Louth, a fine writer, and a good friend to the nascent literary revival.

But the essential point to note is that on the whole of this literary movement there was set, what its writers had taught Ireland to regard as a sure stamp of national worth—the ban of English law. Every man among them had either risked trial for his life or been a fugitive with a price on his head. Enough of them suffered to obtain sanctity for the whole. When the "Memory of the Dead" was sung, nobody asked whether its author, a peaceable Fellow of Trinity, feared, or did not fear, to "speak of Ninety-Eight." His poem was in *The Spirit of the Nation*, that sufficed. On the other hand, work like that to which Ferguson was devoting himself—literature of more lasting value, was disparaged because it lacked this rebel brand.

There is, in truth, among the whole output of that group (excluding Mangan's) only one work for which it is safe to claim very high literary merit—John Mitchel's *Jail Journal*. This work after three quarters of a century reads as fresh as when it was written, and it was written under conditions well fitted to produce a masterpiece in its kind: for it breathes in every line the spirit of indomitable revolt. Mitchel was indicted for sedition along with Smith O'Brien and Meagher in the spring of 1848, the two others were first tried, and the juries in each case disagreed, it was determined to try Mitchel for treason-felony under a special Act which enabled government to

confiscate his paper, *The United Irishmen*, if a conviction were obtained; and this time the Whig authorities, who for years had denounced jury packing, made sure of the affair. Mitchel was sentenced to fourteen years' transportation. The attempt to rescue him by a rising *en masse* of the Dublin mob, which he expected, was not made—though insurrection was then intended, and only deferred. Under heavy escort and ironed, he was taken to the harbour and put on board a government steamer.

The *Journal* proper begins with an account of this military operation, but it is prefaced by a review of the successive "conquests of Ireland"—a nation "so often dead and buried and so often born again." The keynote of the book is faith in a resurrection through insurrection. Only through armed revolt, repeated and repeated, did Mitchel see hope of freedom, and only through freedom any chance of reasonable government. His forecast, at least on one side of it, was fully justified. Catholic emancipation, passed before he and his comrades grew up, was only the first stage in a revolution drawn out over a hundred years and operating at several points of the body politic, by various agencies. But in the stage most recently recorded, when the revolution came nearest to completeness, no force was so strong as the teaching of John Mitchel, revived and reinforced by another journalist of genius, Arthur Griffith, for whom, as for Mitchel, the pen was a weapon rather than an instrument of art.

Yet Mitchel's writing in his *Journal*, where enforced leisure gave scope to the full play of mind, is the writing of a literary artist. The description of his journey, first to Cork harbour, and then, after a brief detainment on Spike Island, to Bermuda, is full of keen visual impressions and pictures of human encounters sharply bitten in. He does not seek to conceal that much courtesy was shown him, rather, he stresses the fact that such a verdict of felony could

not make him a felon, even to the average decent Englishman. But, for the system which these men served, for the British Government, he has nothing but the gall of bitterness, and he saw its seamy side, first in the hulks at Bermuda, where that phase of convict life lay open to observation, then at the Cape, where general revolt prevented England from pouring into a young community a cargo of her own criminals—though to the political felon, John Mitchel, welcome was offered if he chose to land. But the rebel, sympathizing with the revolt, refused to accept this or any special indulgence, and finally went on to Van Diemen's Land with the rest of the shipload.

No man, perhaps, can draw his own portrait without emphasizing those features for which he has approval, and Mitchel's book is the study of indomitable will, not to be bowed by any circumstance of captivity. Prometheus, nailed to his crag by Force and Oppression because he sought to serve mankind, is the image after which he has modelled his own likeness. But to this born writer and multifarious reader memories of beauty return with every meditation, and his prose is shot with phrases out of *Æschylus* almost as often as out of *Milton*—that other rebel. The Bible comes often to his mind, like every Protestant Ulsterman, he was deep-read in it, and the profit on it is, he knows how to curse. Yet behind the cursing here is always humour and often—though not always—kindness even for the enemy's people. It was not possible for a friend and votary of Carlyle to hate all that was English. Above all, there is the love of beauty, not only the lettered love of lovely words, but the countryman's loving eye for all about him. Here is a passage on the Tasmanian bush

“All my life long I have delighted in rivers, rivulets, rills, fierce torrents tearing their rocky beds, gliding



dimpled brooks kissing a daisted marge. The tinkle, or murmur, or deep-resounding roll, or raving roar of running water is of all sounds my ears ever hear now, the most homely. Nothing else in this land looks or sounds like home. The birds have a foreign tongue the very trees whispering to the wind, whisper in accents unknown to me; for your gum-tree leaves are all hard, horny, polished as the laurel—besides, they have neither upper nor under side, but are set on with the plane of them vertical; wherefore they can never, never, let breeze pipe or zephyr breathe as it will, never can they whisper, quiver, sigh or sing, as do the beeches and the sycamores of old Rosstrevor. Yes, all sights and sounds of nature are alien and outlandish—suggestive of the Tropic of Capricorn and the Antarctic Circle—save only the sparkle and the music of the streams. Well I know the voice of this eloquent river: it talks to me, and to the woods and rocks, in the same tongue and dialect wherein the Roe discoursed to me, a child. In its crystalline gush my heart and brain are bathed; and I hear, in its plaintive chime, all the blended voices of history, of prophesy, and poesy, from the beginning. Not cooler or fresher was the Thracian Hebrus, not purer were Abana and Pharpar; not more ancient and venerable is Father Nilus. Before the quiet flow of the Egyptian river was yet disturbed by the jabber of priests of Merce—before the dynasty was yet bred that quaffed the sacred waves of Choaspes, ‘the drink of none but kings’—ere its lordly namesake river, in Erin of the streams, reflected yet upon its bosom a Pillar Tower, or heard the chimes from its seven churches, this river was rushing through its lonely glen to the southern sea, was singing its mystic song to these primeval woods.”

I have quoted at length, and yet perhaps not sufficiently;

for Mitchel's book is the testament of Young Ireland and Young Ireland's was the first deliberate movement to found a school of Irish literature in the English tongue. Irish, the whole literature of the movement is, addressed to an Irish audience, presuming in its readers a knowledge of the past of Ireland, and an interest in that past as in the present and the future, seeking indeed consciously to inform that interest, to give historic pride an armature to build about, making names of battlefields like Benburb or Fontenoy familiar as Bannockburn to the Scots, giving to the more recent heroic figures, Hugh O'Neill, Hugh O'Donnell or Sarsfield something of the halo that hung in peasant imagination about Finn and Ossian and Gull Macmorna. Indeed, the defect in all the verse of *The Spirit of the Nation* is that the writer's aim was too consciously a teacher's or preacher's. The poet, or the writer, in any kind, if he is to do the best, must write in reality to himself. That is what in his *Jail Journal* Mitchel did and was forced to do, using his power of expression as a distraction to make weary weeks pass into months and months into years, pouring out pell-mell, yet with the ordering that shows an artist, his thoughts his feelings his memories, his hopes. In so doing, he lived over again the past of his active effort, he related to that effort and its hopes all that offered itself to his observation, and all that so offered was in some way an expression of the overbearing Power with which he was at war. In so doing, he whetted and renewed what was strongest in him, the will not to accept defeat, the will to a final victory, not to be hoped in his own day.

The less interesting part of his book is that where narrative begins to supersede reflection, for when he reached Australia he had to chronicle not only his impressions of that new land, but his meeting with associates in captivity, his brother-in-law, John Martin, Smith O'Brien and others as well. It passes on to the beginning of plans for rescue

and the long drama of his escape. What is essential to be gathered from this is a sense of the movement's continuity : not literary now, but conspiracy, transferred to regions outside British power, though assuming always that the fires which had been kindled in Young Ireland's early day could again be fanned out of smouldering ashes. Mitchel did not indeed foresee that when the event came which led to a new outbreak, he and his comrades might not be acting together : for, in fact, he and his sons took the side of the South, while Meagher and others were front fighters for the North, in America's Civil War. Yet Irishmen in that war got military training, and when the war was ended were natural leaders for a renewed revolt. No great thing came of it, the Fenian rising in the 'sixties was never formidable—though it made itself feared. But it kept alive the spirit which Mitchel fostered, and it also, though never a literary movement, was in its day stimulated by songs. Leo O'Casey's ballad, "The Rising of the Moon," took its place along with the best-known things from *The Spirit of the Nation*, it has the same importance, and no more than they, as literature. Except in this : it looked to the present, not the past, it was less consciously didactic, it was really a piece of folk song.

The literature which was more than folk song was meanwhile beginning to be created by quiet men in quiet places, working for the sake of the song, not for its political effect. I must deal now with the transition from Young Ireland to the movement which after long seed-time produced a full flowering of Irish genius.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PERIOD OF THE LAND REVOLUTION

THE forty years which followed 1848 are the least fertile period of the nineteenth century in respect of Irish literature, yet within them lies almost all the best of Ferguson's work, and W B Yeats, editing an anthology of Irish verse in 1898, gave it as his opinion that "Conary" was the best Irish poem

I cannot agree with that judgment, and yet in many ways Ferguson seems to rank above Mangan, the most accepted of his contemporaries. There is sinew in his work, there is always a noble seriousness, and a far-sweeping command of imagery. But his verse always lacked something of the singing quality, he never enchants the ear as Mangan could do, and never at any time do words with him take fire as they do in "Dark Rosaleen". There is further this significant difference. Mangan, so much the weaker nature, had an amazing power of adaptation, and caught both the spirit and the accent of Irish poetry, he renders not only the words but the very soul of the poem. Ferguson, on the other hand, is to my thinking always at his best when he is most certainly himself, best of all perhaps in his "Lament for Thomas Davis," written in 1845. Yet his chief value to Irish literature is that he spent his life in an attempt to familiarize the mind of English-speaking Ireland with the mythology and the legendary history which lay behind all literature in the Irish tongue.

Mangan's renderings are all made from the poetry of an Ireland which had been for centuries in contact with Romanized and feudalized Europe, full of allusion, like Gaelic poetry of all periods, to Irish legends and mythical history, but devoid of those peculiar features which render the Irish hero-cycle so difficult of comprehension for minds bred in the culture that descends through Rome from Greece. It is true that the Greek mythology has some analogies with the Celtic, in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* gods intervene in the strife of men. But broadly speaking, they intervene as men and women possessing certain supernatural powers, and the motives which form their action are humanly intelligible. In the Irish stories we are perpetually perplexed by causes for action or inaction that do not explain themselves to us—that need commentary to explain why they were accepted as binding.

Ferguson, when he applies his talent to translate these old poetic imaginings into an English form, has to seek sympathy and comprehension for beings and heroes obeying motives with which he simply cannot identify himself. Only once, to my mind, he found a subject entirely congenial, in *The Burial of King Cormac*. This king, who ruled in Tara some two hundred years before the coming of St. Patrick, had, according to legend, acquired some knowledge of Christianity, and, rejecting pagan beliefs, refused for himself sepulture in the famous burial-place of Brugh-na-Bonne—that "ten-acred tomb," with its inner passages and chambers of Cyclopean stonework covered from view by a vast grass-mantled cairn. No one was better fitted than Ferguson to bring before the mind's eye all the outer semblance of pagan Ireland. Leaving the Bar in middle age to become Deputy-keeper of the Records, he devoted his life to the study of Irish historic documents and historic remains. It was easy for him to understand the revolt of Cormac's old warriors against the dying king's last request,

and to picture how they bore his coffin to the fords of the Boyne and prepared to cross the already swelling river, easy for him (the old angler who never thought of an Irish river without picturing its running salmon) to visualize that gallant wading, and to see the water "fall subdued in foam before the tension of their striding thighs", easy also for him to exult when suddenly the flood swells and surges until "Boyne from their shoulders caught the bier and proudly bore away the King" Easy for him at last to set to a grave music of triumphal verse the ending which tells how shepherds the next morning found the dead Cormac, river-borne to where he had chosen to be laid, on the gentle eastward-looking slope of Rosnaree

But in none of the other stories is there any indication of a Christian bias, or even of anything that should make the story less difficult to be commended to our rationalizing minds and Ferguson cannot refrain from imposing some such twist against the grain of what he handles

Thus at first, when he was seeking to popularize the old hero tales or episodes from known Irish history through his *Hibernian Nights' Entertainments*, he made the hereditary bard of O'Neill tell the stories to the young princes of Tyrone and Tyrconnell, then prisoners in Dublin Castle In the story of the Children of Usnach, Fergus MacRory, bringing them over from Scotland under his pledged protection, was drawn away from their side because a feast was offered him at their landing by one of the Red Branch and it was against his *geasa* to refuse So the sons of Usnach met their death before Fergus returned One of the young princes comments "Had I been Fergus, I would never have deserted my charge for the banquet," but the bard answers, "Such is the tale our ancestors have told us, and it becomes us not to alter or corrupt it" Yet, in a later work, the poet (abandoning prose for his fitter medium) has to tell how the good King Conary, returning

"from strife composed by kingly counsel 'twixt contending lords," is reminded by ominous signs that *geasa* forbid the King of Tara to judge any cause except at Tara at the appointed season; and we find this comment put into Conary's mouth :

"Strange it is  
That act for speedy justice and for peace  
Accomplished, should, with God, be disesteemed."

None the less, the King prays forgiveness; but omen follows on omen till Conary cries out .

"Let every *gaysh*  
That dread Religion with hard-knotting hand  
Binds on the King of Tara, for to-day  
Be broken."

Conary reaches *Dá Dergá's* hostel, and word of his coming goes to the English pirates and Irish outlaws who are marauding on the coast: and the onset comes—not feared, for with Conary are the chief champions of all Ireland. Yet, as the attack develops, party by party the champions sally out, only to disappear; for magic pipers, men of the *Sídh*, lead them in mazes; until at the last, when the King's own "battle-sidesman" returns from a quest for water, he comes too late. And as the champions re-assemble, pale and shame-faced, Conall Cearnach speaks for all :

" 'We were enough  
To have brushed them off as flies; and while we made  
Our sallies through them, bursting from the doors,  
We quelled them flat: but when these wicked sprites,—  
For now I know, men of the *Sídh*, they were—  
Who played their pipes before us, led us on

Into the outer margin of the night,  
No man amongst us all could stay himself,  
Or keep from following, and they kept us there,  
As men who walk asleep, in drowsy trance  
Listening a sweet pernicious melody,  
And following after in an idle round,  
Till all was finished, and the plunderers gone  
Haply they hear me, and the words I speak  
May bring their malice also upon me  
As late it fell on Conary Yet, now  
The spell is off me, and I see the sun,  
By all my nation's swearing-Gods I swear  
I do defy them, and appeal to you,  
Beings of goodness perfect, and to thee  
Great unknown Being who hadst made them all,  
Take ye compassion on the race of men,  
And, for this slavery of *gaysh* and *Sidh*,  
Send down some emanation of yourselves  
To rule and comfort us ' And I have heard  
There come the tidings yet may make us glad  
Of such a one new born, or soon to be  
Now, mount beside me, that with solemn rites  
We give the king, at Tara, burial ' '

In short, the story is told by one who cannot fully enter into the native spirit of it, and the poem suffers. Though the actual telling is superb, in a vigorous blank verse, and although the best judges have praised the poem, it never really reached its mark. "Congal," the longer epic poem, which Ferguson counted his best work, is almost impossible to assimilate. Into it the poet has attempted to fit a review of very early Irish history in the Christian period, linking it to the legendary pagan past. Noble passages abound, but they are patches of modern ornament tacked on. If Ferguson is to be judged it should be in reality by those poems



where his own thought or imagination weds itself happily to the subject, as in *The Burial of King Cormac*, or in the poem on the Cromlech at Hovth, which is reputed to mark the grave of Aiccen, wife of Oscar, Ossian's son. Less good than the "Burial," none the less it has verses such as this :

"When the wintry frosts begin,  
And in their long drawn lonely flight  
The wild geese with their airy din  
Distend the ear of night."

Yet most characteristic of all is this passage of reflection in "Mergedra," linked to the story which tells why Conall Cearnach raised a cairn to a dead woman "by murmuring Liffey and the banks of Clare." Here we have the protest of an Irishman who loves Ireland with all its legend and history against those in Ireland who love only those things which eye can see and hand touch—lovely though these things appear to him also :

" Such seemest thou to Dublin's youth to-day,  
Oh clear-dark Liffey, mid the pleasant land ,  
With life's delights abounding, brave and gay,  
The song, the dance, the softly yielded hand,

" The exulting leap, the backward-flying fence,  
The whirling reel, the steady-levelled gun,—  
With all attractions for the youthful sense,  
All charms to please the manly mind, but one,

" For thou, for them, alas ! nor History hast  
Nor even Tradition , and the Man aspires  
To link his present with his Country's past,  
And live anew in knowledge of his sires,

" No rootless colonist of alien earth,  
Proud but of patient lungs and pliant limb,  
A stranger in the land that gave him birth,  
The land a stranger to itself and him "

The most significant of Ferguson's contemporaries in his later period was William Allingham, who lived from 1824 to 1889. Son of a local bank manager, he was born at Ballyshannon in County Donegal, and, entering the customs service, he was employed in that same region till 1863, when he moved to England. Long before then he had established relations with the literary and artistic world of London, more specially with the pre-Raphaelite group, and the greater part of his poetry has nothing distinctively Irish about it. Yet almost all of it that lives to-day is Irish in feeling and inspiration. The charming verses on the fairy hosts—"Up the airy mountain and down the rushy glen"—were in his first volume, published in 1850. In 1854 this reappeared in his *Day and Night Songs*—for which Arthur Hughes, Millais, and Rossetti furnished illustrations.

With it was his "Lovely Mary Donnelly," a song in imitation of a Gaelic folk song still familiar in his time ; and this set of verses was the model for much that is better known, in a style of which Alfred Graves's "Father O'Flynn" is the best known example. Here is one of Allingham's verses :

"When she stood up for dancing, her steps were so complete  
 The music nearly killed itself to listen to her feet.  
 The fiddler moaned his blindness, he heard her so much  
 praised,  
 But bless'd himself he wasn't deaf when once her voice  
 she raised."

Allingham, in his preface to *Day and Night Songs* notes that it is not easy to write ballad poetry in language that will come home "to the Irish peasant who speaks English, as most of them do now" ("now" being 1854), because their English is not, like Scots, an ancient dialect, but "an imperfect and distorted expression, generally too corrupt (though often forcible) to transplant into poetry." Yet the best thing he ever wrote, and by far the best known, is his "Adieu to Ballyshannon," and the opening verse, with scarcely a departure from standard English, keeps the very accent of Donegal :

"Adieu to Belashanny ! where I was bred and born ,  
 Go where I may, I'll think of you, as sure as night and  
 morn—  
 The kindly spot, the friendly town, where every one is  
 known,  
 And not a face in all the place but partly seems my own ;  
 There's not a house or window, there's not a field or hill,  
 But, east or west, in foreign lands, I'll recollect them still

I leave my warm heart with you, tho' my back I'm forced  
to turn—

So adieu to Belashanny, and the winding banks of Erne ! ”

In a word, Allingham brought a touch of genuine and deep poetic feeling into that facility for swift and airy rhyming that Irish music inspired—of which Lever and Lover, to name only two, had given so many examples. One may trace his influence even in some early and delightful work of Yeats—“Down by the Sally Gardens my love I did meet”

Another writer who left a lasting mark, though only by one poem, was Helen, Lady Dufferin. Her “Irish Emigrant” was written in 1845, before Allingham had yet published. I must note here also the work of another Irish poetess, probably the most widely known of all, and yet not known as Irish—Mrs. Alexander, whose first collection of Hymns appeared in 1848. I begin now to write of authors known to me as living persons, and feel the difficulty of deciding what belongs properly to my subject. But beyond yea or nay, Cecil Frances Humphreys—born and bred in County Carlow, and married in 1850 to William Alexander, afterwards Bishop of Derry and finally Archbishop of Armagh—was heart and soul an Irishwoman, though not an Irish nationalist. Whether her hymns can be claimed as in any sense distinctively Irish, is not clear to me, if a claim were to be made, I should rest it on their simplicity. But that some of them present the essential characteristics of genuine poetry, Professor Housman, most fastidious of critics, has testified in his discourse on the “Name and Nature of Poetry.”

I should be in the same difficulty, if this book attempted to include a review of oratory, about Archbishop Alexander, admittedly among the most famous orators of his long day—many of whom, whether in pulpit or on platform, were

Irish. Certainly in his preaching, he no more attempted to express distinctively Irish thought than she in her hymns ; and yet I cannot help feeling that either of them was somehow more truly Irish than their contemporary Aubrey de Vere, who so often in his poetry chose Ireland for his subject and whose deeply religious mind was possessed by the same faith as his Gaelic fellow-countrymen.

In the generation after the famine there was no creative work in prose of any consequence. Carleton's most popular novel, *Willy Reilly*, was published in 1855, but it has no literary merit. Lever having transferred his abode from Dublin to the Continent, continued to turn out witty, fluent, but loose-spun novels, lacking the dash and verve of his fancy's first sprightly runnings, yet in some measure atoning for the lack by a better nourished commentary on life. He died in 1872, three years later than Carleton. Nationalist Ireland accepted enthusiastically Charles Kickham's *Knocknagow*, a peasant's story of life in Tipperary, but it cannot be seriously regarded as literature.

In those years, however, one prose writer rendered high service to Ireland. William E. H. Lecky, a student in Trinity from 1856 onwards (classfellow with David Plunkett and William Gibson, afterwards famous in law and politics), opened his career as a writer in 1861 with a book of studies, *Leaders of Public Opinion in Ireland*. This had no success, but in 1867 his *History of Rationalism* made him celebrated before he was thirty. In 1878 he began to publish his *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, of which a great part—five volumes out of twelve—was devoted to the Irish aspect. Avowedly, Lecky's purpose was to counteract the impression left by Froude's violently anti-Catholic, and, to that extent, anti-Irish writings. Yet Lecky himself was not in any sympathy with Catholicism, and politically was opposed to the Irish aspiration for self-government. But he brought, for the first time, to the

study of Irish history the light of cool reason, informed by a love of justice, and his lucid orderly exposition rose at times to moving eloquence

The record of English rule during the eighteenth century is a record of very gross misgovernment, and his book therefore became an arsenal for nationalist propaganda. In spite of this, and in spite of his detachment from creeds, his university, profoundly Unionist and Protestant though it was, honoured itself by choosing him to represent it in parliament. His statue in its court commemorates a nobly candid man of letters rather than a politician.

Critics from the nationalist side have urged with some justice that Lecky concerned himself solely with the life of the Anglo-Irish and the doings of a parliament which represented their transient ascendancy—that, being ignorant of the Irish language and literature, he did not approach to sources where he could have enlightened himself concerning the permanent and native Irish stock. A man with the same disposition and the same thoroughness of work, writing fifty years later, would have necessarily used much that Lecky had not available—of which indeed he did not guess the existence. But even these critics are not slow to recognize the debt which all Ireland and Irish literature owe to this Anglo-Irishman. Lecky's balance is the more admirable because of the time in which he wrote. The Fenian rising of 1867, though it caused alarm, was merely a symptom of unrest. Agitation for Home Rule, led by Isaac Butt, who had become a convert to nationalism, did not seriously inconvenience the English Government. But at the close of the 'seventies, when a bad season brought renewed distress, an Irishman revived the proposal first mooted in *The Nation* by James Fintan Lalor. This was virtually a general strike against the payment of rent, until rents should be lowered. The leading agitator was Michael Davitt, son of an evicted tenant from Mayo, who had

grown up in Lancashire among a mining community, and thus became familiar with combinations of the many against the masters. He had served ten years in jail for his share in the Fenian raid for arms on Chester Castle, and had come back with a determination to break landlord rule in Ireland, and with a conviction that English working men would back the Irish tenants. At the same time Charles Stewart Parnell had begun to assert his supremacy among the Irish members of Parliament; and these two men, aided by a band of extremely able speakers and writers, had within three years banded into one organisation the Catholic Irish tenantry and the millions of Irish emigrants. The avowed aim was directed at limiting the landlord's right to fix rent at his own discretion and evict for non-payment. But the landlords held that the real aim was expropriation. In fact, within forty years there were no landlords left. With the disappearance of landlord power, England's hold on the country grew yearly weaker.

Meantime in parliament Parnell's method of using the procedure of the House of Commons to obstruct all business concentrated attention on Ireland: and the decade from 1880 to 1890 was full of fierce political excitement. Little else was thought of but the land war and the Home Rule campaign. There was much vigorous journalism, and several of Parnell's lieutenants were excellent writers. Foremost among them was William O'Brien, a young man from Cork, whose weekly paper, *United Ireland*, carried on a ferocious campaign. Before long O'Brien was returned to parliament and developed extraordinary talent as a speaker and agitator—leading a life in which literary work proper was not possible. But in two of his periods of incarceration (for all the active men were repeatedly imprisoned) he used his leisure to write a novel of the Fenian period in which he had grown up; and this book—*When we were Boys*—had a great vogue, deserved by fervid energy

and a generous enthusiasm. Yet it is singularly devoid of artistic merit. O'Brien's place in Irish literature will be determined by the work of his later years, when he had, at first to some extent, and finally altogether, withdrawn from political conflict, and occupied himself with a series of memoirs, which will always be good reading. But he was always politician first and man of letters afterwards, and by far too vehement in his politics to be fairly appraised as a writer in his own time.

One of his elder colleagues, Justin McCarthy, was on the other hand a man of letters, who entered parliament against the grain of his gentle nature but brought into Parnell's following a very considerable reputation, peaceably acquired by his *History of our own Time*. He had a suavity and simplicity of exposition which recall Goldsmith's best hackwork, and his many novels are pervaded by the charm of a very quiet humour. The hardships of a cruel time forced him into a prominence that he never desired, as leader of the majority which left Parnell rather than break with Gladstone, but he was perhaps the only man who never embittered that savage controversy, and he deserves to be remembered as one who placed at the political service of Ireland a talent and a judgment formed in literature and for literature, and paid for it in the ruin of his peace and his health.

Another member of the party, T. D. Sullivan, one of a brilliant clan, was the song writer of the movement, and his verses in praise of the Manchester Martyrs—(three Fenians hanged for a death inflicted during an attempted rescue)—became the nationalist anthem. "God save Ireland" had at least as much literary merit as "The Soldiers' Song" of our day—or, for that matter, as "God save the King".

All this writing was in one sense continuous with the literary movement launched by Davis and Duffy, but in



another it differed notably. "Young Ireland" had aimed at binding all Irishmen into one national consciousness: in this new phase of the revolution, tenants as such were banded against the landlord class. Landlords rather than England were the enemy. Many Irishmen were estranged from the new movement who might have probably taken part in the earlier one. A significant figure, far too little recognized, was the Hon. Emily Lawless, daughter of Lord Cloncurry, who published, in 1886, at the very height of the revolution, her novel *Hurrish*—a study of peasant life in Burren, the strange, stony, cliff-bound region of north Clare, which faces Galway Bay and the open Atlantic. The Ribbon Lodges of Carleton's and Banim's books are now replaced by the Land League; but, like all other Irish novelists of that century, she stresses the truth that all peasant Ireland regards the law as alien. *Hurrish* O'Brien, the good-natured giant who is the central figure of her story, has sympathy with his landlord and tries to avoid trouble by giving counsel. But he gives the counsel secretly, and when trouble comes, the last thing he thinks of is to consult the law. The plot need not be discussed here; yet for the purposes of her plot Miss Lawless, I think, makes her villain act as no Irish countryman would have done—least of all, one hoping to become a leader in the League. The book's merit lies in the beauty of its descriptions, and in the study of the pathetic girl Aily whose love is set on *Hurrish*. Miss Lawless has in truth more regard for Irish women than for Irish men, and in her second novel, whose scene is laid on the Aran islands, Grania the heroine, and her devout half-sister Honor, make a marked contrast to the worthless and cowardly young fisherman to whom Grania has given her love. *Grania* is a better book than *Hurrish*, and they appeared at a time when no novel of Irish life approaching them in literary quality had been seen for many years. Miss Lawless is in love with the wild beauty

of Clare's wind-swept expanses of rocks, whether on island or on the mainland, she is in love with the beauty and the tender charm of Irish women. But she is estranged from a race whose marriages are arranged without regard for anything but convenience and whose courtships seem to her singularly bloodless affairs. Among the men whom she depicts, Hurrish only is entirely likeable and even he leaves leadership to the eloquent talkers and lets them lead into action which his humanity abhors, though his hereditary submission to the unwritten law will not allow him to resist it.

In short, Miss Lawless disliked all that was revolutionary in the Ireland of her day and despised much of it. Yet, when she threw her imagination back into the past, instantly she became a rebel. Her volume of poems *With the Wild Geese*, contains several poems, any one of which would have been more than welcome in *The Nation*, for none of *The Nation's* poets ever put with such fierce eloquence the cry of those Irish soldiers whose valour could only prove itself on some alien soil, and whose crowning glory was the day of Fontenoy, when "Clare's Brigade" turned the day against England. I quote from one Ireland speaks

She said "I never gave them aught  
Not mine the power, if mine the will,  
I let them starve, I let them bleed,  
They bled and starved, and loved me still

She said 'I never called them sons,  
I almost ceased to breathe their name,  
Then caught it echoing down the wind,  
Blown backward from the lips of Fame"

These things were only known in 1902 but they had been written and privately published years earlier, when Stopford

Brooke saw them and urged publication. A few Irish readers came to know them, yet never did they attain to any of the popularity which met *The Spirit of the Nation*. But of the nationalist poetry in that kind, nothing else approaches in quality these ballads and lyrics written by an Irish Unionist.

I have written here of Miss Lawless because she does not belong to the literary movement which began in Parnell's day and grew into strength during the decade following his death. Though these books of hers date from that period, they are in reality the final flowering of the seed sown by Thomas Davis—I should note also that, before 1880, a young man called Oscar Wilde was an undergraduate at Magdalen College in Oxford and incarnated the "æsthetic" movement of those days. His father, Sir William Wilde, famous as an oculist and also as an antiquarian, had married Francesca Elgee, several of whose poems had appeared in *The Nation*, signed "Speranza." Oscar Wilde, before going to Oxford, had passed through Trinity, then in perhaps its most brilliant period.

I was a schoolboy reading Latin and Greek from 1876 on; bookishly brought up, brought up, moreover, on *The Spirit of the Nation*; but throughout the 'seventies no Irish writer was producing any work that was recognized as important, and even the young men were conscious of a vacuum. On the other hand, even a schoolboy in 1876 knew that Tyrrell and Mahaffy were not merely professors in Trinity, but were famous men. They were indeed, and so also was Salmon, mathematician and theologian, most accurately described by an eighteenth century term: they were great wits. All Ireland was proud of them. Among scholars, Palmer, Abbott, Ingram, and later, Lewis Claude Purser, were recognized as of the same rank; but for the general public, only one other name was equally known—

that of Edward Dowden the professor of English literature

Dowden, of old Protestant stock among the business community of Cork city, was by tradition and conviction strongly Unionist indeed he took a more prominent political part than any of the other professors Nevertheless he became a chief rallying point for the new literary movement, whose movers were all strongly nationalist in sympathy At his house Yeats then a youth of eighteen to twenty, was a constant guest on Sunday afternoons—often with his father, most brilliant of talkers, Douglas Hyde was often present, a former pupil of Dowden's in Trinity, as was also another of the group, T W Rolleston These men were five or six years older than Yeats, so also was Charles Hubert Oldham, a student of economics, in whose rooms opposite the front gate of college the "Contemporary Club" met every Monday night for discussion of all manner of subjects

That also was a radiating centre, but no one presided there, as without seeming to, Dowden presided in his own house, setting the key of discussion Practically all Dowden's guests came to Oldham's rooms but they met others there as well, notably J F Taylor a young barrister much admired for his oratory, in whom some hoped to see a successor to Davis But Taylor stood apart from regular politics as also did Rolleston and Oldham who would have been enlisted in Parnell's party, had they not kicked at the notion of the party pledge—to act and vote with the party in all issues The regular politicians did not often attend but Michael Davitt came sometimes More frequent in attendance was John O'Leary, the most picturesque survivor of Fenian times, who had lived long in Paris after his period of imprisonment, an eagle faced, grey-bearded old man, to whom Rolleston in particular had attached himself

The Fenians in general had been induced by Davitt to support Parnell's policy : but Davitt himself had no love of parliament or politicians, while O'Leary stood for the type which regarded the new movement as a squabble about rents and votes, somewhat degrading to the national spirit. For him the Fenian movement had been a survival of Young Ireland's aspirations and to the young men of letters he stood—in Yeats' phrase—for "romantic Ireland."

He was probably the indispensable link between these intellectuals, nearly all of whom were non-Catholic, and those who represented a more normal nationalism. There were of course a few elder Catholics in the Contemporary Club, notably Dr. George Sigerson, a professor in the Catholic university college, and a learned student of the Gaelic literature. But he had no standing in the eyes of the Irish public. John O'Leary was however able to introduce the young men to an amazing link with the past—reaching back past Fenian times to the heart of Young Ireland itself. The man who, with Davis, had been the chief inspiration of the Young Ireland movement, had returned to Europe in 1878, now Sir Charles Gavan Duffy, sometime Prime Minister of Victoria. For the most part he lived in the South of France, but made visits to Ireland, and there, in concert with Yeats, Rolleston, and others, he revived the attempt to make the Irish people more aware of their own history. A series of books was undertaken, and called "The New Irish Library," with Gavan Duffy as general editor, assisted by Douglas Hyde in Dublin and by Barry O'Brien in London. Allied to this was the foundation of a National Literary Society in Dublin and an Irish Literary Society in London. Perhaps because the rules of both excluded all discussion of religion or politics, the London society thrived better—though even there the rule was not maintained without friction. But it was more important that from 1887 onwards Yeats was living in London, whither his

family had migrated, and he was active in the establishment of this centre. Gavin Duffy was its first president. Later his successor, Stopford Brooke, eloquent in his special pulpit and an admirable critic of literature, made a better rallying point than could be found in Dublin.

Rolleston also migrated to London. His part in the early stages of the movement is not adequately appreciated. In fact, he was the first person to publish work by Yeats for a new periodical, *The Dublin University Review*, was issued from Trinity under his editorship and Oldham's. In this appeared *The Island of Statues* and *Mosada*—early productions from which Yeats has preserved only one or two songs.

My recollection is that none of the young literary group regarded these as work of conspicuous merit, yet nothing in them shook our conviction that Yeats was destined to be a poet of the first order. There was in these poems a new voice, an approach to poetry quite new in Irish literature, but there was not yet the personality which was to inform the man's whole expression.

On the other hand, when a tiny volume of verses was brought out obscurely with the title *Homeward Songs by the Way*, and the signature 'A. E.', we realized that a new talent was in full flower. The writer's name, George Russell, soon became familiar to all those interested in poetry.

These two men were to dominate the entire literary revival, and affect the whole intellectual life of Ireland in their time. Yet both were estranged from the general mass of Irish people by preoccupations in which the normal Irishman had no share. Both were mystics. But whereas in George Russell mysticism appeared inseparable from his being, with Yeats it had the aspect of an exotic cult. Russell was of service to Ireland through the philosophy which radiated through his nature. It was in part a love of beauty,

but more truly a love of humanity, of the divine in human nature. In poetry he had from the first as full command of the medium as he ever attained.

“Far up the dim twilight fluttered  
Moth wings of vapour and flame,  
The lights danced over the mountains,  
Star after star they came

“The lights grew thicker unheeded,  
But silent and still were we,  
Our hearts were drunk with a beauty  
Our eyes could never see.”

Nothing that he ever wrote is better or more characteristic, and it will be seen at once that although the man's personality comes through, nothing in the expression is distinctive. It was not as an artist, nor by his example to other artists, that Russell was to serve Irish literature; rather as an influence always encouraging, a sympathy always ready to welcome any congenial writer. No one disputes that he was a poet, he took rank from the first with those who will not be forgotten, yet it is a question whether his most lasting influence was not exercised through personal contacts and through prose writings that were by their nature ephemeral. Saints are not common in literature, but the effect of George Russell was an effect of saintliness—which did not exclude humour from his conversation, nor anger from his written work. Like other saints, he had a gift of denunciation, used against those whose conduct offended his vision of beauty—and like theirs, his anger was not always justified. But in essence A.E.'s philosophy, even more than his power to express that philosophy, served his country. A soul of singular nobility, with an unquenchable interest in the literary work of others, moved through Ireland.

Yeats was above all exemplary as the artist whom nothing short of perfection contents whose labour after an exacting standard of beauty is lifelong and whose standard is endlessly varied, since with man's growth the conception of beauty alters. Such example was sorely needed. Moore indeed had been a most conscientious workman, by far more finished than Byron or Scott, but the effects at which Moore aimed were often meretricious, and the best of his verses are in a medium too near to rhetoric. Ferguson, a fine craftsman in some ways, lacked fineness of ear. Apart from them, the Irish writers in English above all in English prose had been content to get what they had to say said somehow or other. The greatest service that Yeats rendered to Ireland was his persistent refusal to accept as admirable anything that was commended solely by patriotic or virtuous intention. He taught Ireland the value of a certain intellectual arrogance, a contempt for the standards of the crowd.

Both men he and Russell, were throughout dominated by an honourable desire to serve, and thus in both took the shape of attempting to give Ireland a finer sense of the beautiful. Both had in more than ordinary measure the solitariness of the artist's mind. But for Russell the pursuit of his own art, even of his personal ideal meant withdrawal into meditation. Yet, his nature making him the most communicable of human beings, he was impelled by the desire of service to sacrifice even his own art, to be teacher rather than creator. Whereas for Yeats service meant literally the austere and implacable pursuit of an artistic ideal which should impose itself on other workers. A time came when he was impelled to a form of art in which his work could not be solitary, not done in isolation. Not a dramatist by nature, he turned to the drama with results of incalculable value for the literature of Ireland. So great a force could not be brought into contact with



groups of other workers and not transmit much of its own virtue. Yet nothing could have seemed more unlikely, when these two young poets began to appear in the 'eighties, than that they should come to be known and felt throughout the land by their characters rather than by what they wrote. For, if the truth is to be spoken, neither Yeats nor A.E. has ever been widely read in Ireland. They never gave to Ireland what Moore gave in one way, and the writers of *Young Ireland* in another, a poetry for common consumption. The first thing that Yeats had to do was to declare on all occasions that such poetry is not strengthening, though it may excite; that is it no food for the mind. These opinions were denounced for flat blasphemy; but the young poet had a will like steel, and to it more than to any other cause is due the place which Irish literature has come to hold.

But in the period of successful revolution, while Parnell was forcing one surrender after another from the British government, there was no hearing to be had for divergent views upon literary excellence. Only after death in 1891 had put its seal on Parnell's overthrow, and all hope of fresh effort under that tremendous leadership was ended, did the thoughts of Ireland begin to turn from their exclusive preoccupation with a political struggle. That conflict indeed went on, but it was largely internecine; and the three young men in Ireland who had most to give began to find their gifts at last considered for acceptance. I have now to consider the self-conscious literary movement of which in different ways they were the prime movers.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE REVIVAL OF GAELIC

MANY forces contribute to the main drift of a movement, which in this case was really the impulse of Irish nationality to assert itself and from 1870 onward the dominant desire of nationalist Ireland was for control and finally possession of the land. Very different emotions were aroused by that struggle in an Irishman of old Gaelic stock who belonged by tradition and formation to the landlord class. This was Standish James O'Grady, born in 1846, son of a Protestant rector near Castletown Beare in West Cork, the Desmond country. His father's brother, Standish Hayes O'Grady, had been one of the foremost students of Irish and had translated a great body of the Ossianic saga—the Wanderings of Diarmuid and Grania—into a very strange English. The younger Standish went into Trinity, read for the Bar, but turned to journalism on the Dublin Tory press and, like all the Irish young men in the early and mid-Victorian decades, was profoundly influenced by Carlyle. He believed in leadership, the right and duty of the aristocracy to lead, and it seemed to him that, for failing in this duty, the Irish landed gentry were about to be swept away. He put these views with great power in a volume on *Toryism and Democracy*, of which a whole section was addressed to the Irish Tory landlords—in part to those of whom he had no hope, the "rootless colonists," and in part to those few whom he counted able and willing

still to redeem the credit of their order. These writings, however, though admired for their prose, had no effect: it was otherwise when his imagination and reading attempted to recreate an Ireland in which leadership was everything, and nobles were princes in battle. Neglecting the later cycle of the *Fianna*, O'Grady retold in glowing prose the stories of the Red Branch chivalry and valour, treating Cuchulain as the central figure, an even nobler Achilles. Ferguson had done the same, but in O'Grady's prose the stories came to stronger life than in Ferguson's verse. Yet his *Bardic History* was published in the same year, 1880, as Ferguson's *Collected Poems*; and Yeats is reported to have said later that "whatever came out of Ireland in the future would owe itself to these two books." A paper written by A.E. for the memoir published in 1925 sums up the effect of O'Grady's work on him and on others:

"I was at the time like many others who were bereaved of the history of their race. It was the memory of race which rose up within me as I read, and I felt exalted as one who learns that he is among the children of kings. In O'Grady's writings the submerged river of national culture rose up again, a shining torrent, and I realized, as I had bathed in that stream, that the greatest spiritual evil one nation could inflict upon another was to cut off from it the story of the national soul. . . . He was the last champion of the Irish aristocracy and still more the voice of conscience for them, and he spoke to them of their duty to the nation as one might imagine some fearless prophet speaking to a council of degenerate princes. . . . O'Grady maybe has failed in his appeal to the aristocracy of his own time, but he may yet create an aristocracy of character and intellect in Ireland. It was he who made me proud and conscious of my country and recalled my mind, that might have wandered

otherwise over too vague a field of thought, to think of the earth under my feet and the children of our common mother "

A worker of such quality as O'Grady was naturally enlisted when the movement under Gavan Duffy's auspices sought to popularize a knowledge of Irish history, and his *Bog of Stars* was one of the most successful volumes in the New Irish Library. But even more widely known is his *Flight of the Eagle*, a vivid retelling of Red Hugh O'Donnell's captivity and escape in the last years of Elizabeth's reign. Dressing the historic episode in the colours of fiction, but basing his narrative on carefully established fact, he made a book which has ever since been read throughout Ireland, both in its original form and in Gaelic rendering. No such vogue attended his attempt to make the bardic tales familiar. Ireland was eager for stories of the perpetually renewed struggle against England, it was by comparison indifferent to the remote past when Ireland's own chivalry lived a life outside the general framework of Europe.

Nevertheless in one respect O'Grady succeeded. Cuchulain, the young hero of the North, became more familiar to Irish imagination than any of the later Ossianic cycle and Patrick Pearse, whose part in the movement will have to be described later, made Cuchulain as it were the embodiment of his peculiar idealism.

Yet it has to be noted that the planned literary movement was in a sense exotic. It came from Protestant Irishmen who had a cult of Ireland wholly exceptional in their stock, and the first considerable poet who came out of Catholic Ireland, although closely in touch with Yeats and Russell, shows no trace at all of their influence. Katharine Tynan was the daughter of a large farmer in County Dublin, active in the Land League, and devoted to Parnell. She was by sympathy heart and soul with the

main political effort which the non-Catholic group, Yeats, Russell, Rolleston, Taylor, and the rest, looked at from the outside and looked at with critical eyes. Her poetry, so far as its form was concerned, followed English models, the school of the Rossetts. The title of her first volume, published in 1885 (before either Yeats or Russell had attained to print)—*Louise de la Vallière*—indicates the subject of its principal poem. "Joan of Arc" inspired another, and among a score or so only three were on Irish themes. One of these had to do with the "Wild Geese", another based itself on the legend of the Fianna, supposed to be sleeping armed in a cave, ready for the day of Ireland's deliverance; another was an elegy on the death of A. M. Sullivan, perhaps the most eloquent of a family in which eloquence was traditional—a leading figure of constitutional nationalism before Parnell's dominance began. These three poems showed where the poet's sympathy lay, but they were not characteristic of her talent, except that in them, as elsewhere, there was easy lucid utterance in harmonious rhythm. She was already, and through a long life she was increasingly, the poetess of Irish country scenes—of the rich pastoral Ireland rather than the wild mountain and bogland, cliff and river; from the first a great bird lover; but above all a Catholic poet, not mystical, but simply enchanted with the beauty and the tenderness of all the stories of the saints. In so far as the creation of a distinctive Irish literature was organized and worked for, she never belonged to the movement. Yet appearing when it did, her work strengthened the movement. In it Ireland had something to show, not the less Irish because it was never self-consciously Irish—something Irish because it could be no other.

With her should be mentioned two other poetesses whose work was far less important both in quality and quantity yet theirs was kin to hers. One was a much

older woman, Ellen O'Leary, the old Fenian's sister, the other was Rose Kavanagh, who like Katharine Tynan lived among the young Dublin literary group, friends with them all yet little affected by their views either on literature or politics. Irish these poetesses were, to the uttermost, but it did not occur to them to think of themselves as Gaelic, still less as Celtic, and the talk in the air now began to be of a "Celtic revival."

Yeats set the example. His first published book of verse, *The Wanderings of Uisíen* (it appeared in 1888, when he was three-and-twenty), drew, as Ferguson had drawn, its matter from Gaelic mythology. But Ferguson, in reshaping the old legends, had hammered them down into something approaching the taut shapes which Homer transmitted. Yeats showed himself perhaps truer to the spirit of the original when he dissolved the whole into the vagueness and vastness of a dream. Vision emerged here and there suddenly, with all of a dream's intermittent distinctness, but it was a dim world somewhere between night and day, between waking and sleeping, that his imagination moved in, utterly remote from the clear hard light of Mediterranean shores. The truth was that, as I have pointed out before, all this body of myth-making lay outside the classic European track, men and women in it moved under laws and impulses unintelligible to us, and Yeats, seeking to identify himself with the spirit of them, instinctively made a dream world. I reproduce his own account of the movement from a preface to the selections from Nora Hopper in *The Treasury of Irish Poetry*, edited by Stopford Brooke and Rolleston.

"Modern poetry grows weary of using over and over again the personages and stories and metaphors that have come to us through Greece and Rome or from Wales and Brittany through the Middle Ages and has

found new life in the Norse and German legends. The Irish legends, in popular tradition and in old Gaelic literature, are more numerous and as beautiful, and alone among great European legends have the beauty and wonder of altogether new things. May not one say, then, without saying anything improbable, that they will have a predominant influence in the coming century, and that their influence will pass through many countries? I cannot go by certain brown bogs covered with white tufts of bog-cotton—places where the world seems to become faint and fragile—without remembering the verses Nova Hopper's Daluan—a kind of Irish Pan—sings among the bogs, I remember them, they run in my head for hours

'All the way to Tír na n'Og are many roads that run,  
But the darkest road is trodden by the King of  
Ireland's son,  
The world wears on to sundown, and love is lost and  
won,  
But he recks not of loss or gain, the King of Ireland's  
son  
He follows on for ever, when all your chase is done,  
He follows after shadows—the King of Ireland's son'

One does not know why he sings it, or why he dies on November Eve, nor does one well know why any of her best stories shaped itself into the strange, drifting, dreamy thing it is, and one is content not to know. They delight us by their mystery, as ornament full of lines, too deeply interwoven to weary us with a discoverable secret, delights us with its mystery, and as ornament is full of strange beasts and trees and flowers, that were once the symbols of great religions, and are now mixing one with another, and changing into new

shapes, this book is full of old beliefs and stories, mixing and changing in an enchanted dream "

That admirably characterizes the movement in so far as it was a "Celtic Revival", the approach of a group of writers to a literature written in a language that they did not know, embodying the thoughts of a world divided from them by more than mere lapse of time—a world outside the Christian cycle, and outside the Greco-Roman tradition of art, a world cut off not only from the writers but from the living Irish for whom, if they were to make an Irish revival, they must be presumed to write. Such work must go on long before it could be more than a literary exercise, it must make the persons and events of the cycle so familiar that Irish imagination could use them instinctively and count on instinctive response, and hardly even now, almost fifty years later, when poet after poet has told and retold in English these old stories, can they be thought to be naturalized in *English-speaking Ireland*.

Yet from the first Yeats, personally, did untold service to Irish literature, he set an example of Irish craftsmanship, he gave those who loved Ireland already an Irish achievement to be proud of, with the promise—richly to be kept—of far more. And, as part of a group, he turned the thoughts of Ireland in on its own native imaginings, taught Irish writers to seek pasture in their own fields.

Meanwhile quite another harvest from the same fields began to be reaped by quite a different worker. Douglas Hyde, son of a rector on the borders of Roscommon and Mayo, grew up in an Irish-speaking district, and from boyhood was fascinated by the language. All languages came easy to him, his career in Trinity was brilliant, but at the end of it, as at the beginning, his chief concern was Irish—at a time when it seemed to Irishmen in general almost a



contradiction in terms that an educated man should speak Gaelic. It was for this knowledge, then so rare, that Gavan Duffy chose him to be assistant-editor of the New Irish Library. But Hyde's own work was done independently, collecting and editing, with translations of his own, first two books of folk tales, and then the Love Songs of Connacht. Through these things, his generation (he was five years older than Yeats) began to know more of the Irish mind than either Carleton or Banim had disclosed to them; for the soul of a people speaks best through its verse.

In Hyde's renderings the lyrical cry now and then comes through, as in this opening

" My grief on the sea  
How the waves of it roll,  
For they heave between me  
And the love of my soul "

Yet in a translation he has never produced anything comparable to the best of Walshe or of Callanan, still less of Mangan. nor, indeed, to one version by Rolleston, from Enoch O'Gillan, "The Dead at Clonmacnoise," which need hardly be quoted here, since it is in a score of English anthologies. Yet it shall be given, to illustrate how the work of an Irish sixteenth century bard was interwoven with allusions to a whole world of history which, for the Ireland of Parnell, had almost faded out of recoverable knowledge :

#### "THE DEAD AT CLONMACNOISE"

"In a quiet water'd land, a land of roses,  
Stands Saint-Kieran's city fair :  
And the warriors of Erin in their famous generations  
Slumber there.

There beneath the dewy hillside sleep the noblest  
Of the clan of Conn,  
Each below his stone with name in branching Ogham  
And the sacred knot thereon

“There they laid to rest the seven Kings of Tara,  
There the sons of Cairbre sleep—  
Battle-banners of the Gael, that in Kieran’s plain of crosses  
Now their final hosting keep

“And in Clonmacnois they laid the men of Teffia,  
And right many a lord of Breagh,  
Deep the sod above Clan Creide and Clan Conaill,  
Kind in hall and fierce in fray

“Many and many a son of Conn, the Hundred-Fighter,  
In the red earth lies at rest  
Many a blue eye of Clan Colman the turf covers,  
Many a swan-white breast’

Hyde, like his fellow-workers and their forerunner Ferguson, went out to save for Ireland this inheritance but to him a more difficult task seemed even more vital—to save the language itself in which O’Gillan and the rest wrote. Fixed in his mind was the belief that a nation without a distinctive language was like an army without uniform— even more, that without a distinctive language there could be no distinctive national existence. In 1893 when Parnell was dead and Parnellites and Anti-Parnellites were tearing each other to pieces, he with a few others founded a new organization to revive and preserve the Irish language. Thenceforward Hyde was only in a secondary sense a writer— his main energy was thrown into propaganda, for which he disclosed absolute genius. Within ten years the Gaelic League was a powerful body, having

ramifications in Great Britain and the United States, and making its chief concern to secure for Irish a place in the education of all the Irish.

The League was in theory non-political and non-sectarian, and Hyde spared no effort to keep it so. Indeed, this language movement, launched by a Protestant, was taken up strongly by Catholic Irishmen; Eóin MacNeill (later so famous as a scholar that Ireland almost forgot he had been a rebel sentenced to death) was Hyde's closest associate. Father O'Growney, a Maynooth professor, was perhaps the most zealous of the early propagandists. But official nationalism took no active hand in the movement, members of the Irish party followed the tradition inherited from O'Connell through Parnell, and O'Connell had actively discouraged the use of Gaelic. The higher clergy of the Catholic Church, educated in the same tradition, maintained on the whole the same attitude, though there was friendliness for the movement in two succeeding cardinal archbishops, Logue and O'Donnell, both children of Irish-speaking homes.

My concern here is not with the history of the Gaelic League but with its effects on Irish literature. It led of course to much writing in Gaelic, and Hyde himself wrote a couple of small plays which pleased me more than any of his English verse. He published also in 1899 a *History of Irish Literature*, which at all events enabled those of us who knew no Irish to gain some notion as a whole of what Ireland's imagination had produced. But by general admission the Irish writer of most moment was an old priest in County Cork, Father Peter O'Leary, who flung himself heart and soul into the revival. I quote here one of his own renderings from his own version of *Æsop's Stories*:

## "THE SERPENT AND THE CRAB

"A crab and a venomous serpent happened to be living in one house. The crab was honest and straightforward in his disposition and his mind. Not so with the serpent. He was a hypocritical twister. The crab did not like the twisting and the crooked dealing. He often gave the serpent advice that was good for him, but it was no good. The crookedness and deceit were in the serpent by generation, and the world would not make him drop them. At last the crab got afraid of him. He became suspicious of him and he came to distrust him. 'He will kill me some night in my sleep,' said he. 'I may as well be beforehand with him,' said he. He killed the serpent that night.

When the serpent was dead he was stretched out on the floor as straight as a rule and not a turn or twist of him to one side or other. The crab looked at him for a while. At last he said, out of his meditation, 'If your living state had been as straight as your dead state is, your days would have been longer.'

## MORAL

Death makes a straight man of the crookedest rogue  
 Avoid a sweet slippery trickster  
 Do not keep company with deceit, or deceit will be  
 practised on you."

Undoubtedly the effect of the Gaelic revival was to add distinctiveness to Irish literature in the English tongue. Many literary folk acquired at least a smattering of the language, and were interested to find the originals of quaint idioms familiar in an Irish peasant's English. Carleton, Baun, and Griffin had all freely employed a few of the

Irish terms of endearment, yet they had not made their readers feel the charm which lies in such a phrase as *mavrone* (literally "my trouble") *mea maxima cura*, *achuid* (my share of life), *asthore* (my treasure), *aroon* (my secret), and so on. Irish writers were led to study the English spoken by those whose thought was really translated from Irish, and out of this, Lady Gregory, but above all, Synge, drew rich new colours. Later still, it will have to be noted how the technique of verse in English was altered by poets familiar with Irish assonance.

But in the period at which the self-conscious movement began, one cannot put it much higher than to say, men of letters grew aware of the Irish language. In 1890, probably more educated persons in Ireland knew Hindu than knew Gaelic, ten or fifteen years later a smattering of Irish was as common as a smattering of French. But the political effect of this non-political association was notable, and it soon affected literature. It afforded a rallying point for those who were disgusted by the parliamentary struggle, then in a very unattractive period. Young nationalist sympathies flowed into it. Part of them found further expression in a renewal of the Fenian spirit, and the republican separatist ideal, and this group soon produced a remarkable successor to John Mitchel. Those who preached the policy which soon got the Gaelic phrase "*Sinn Féin*" ("ourselves") attached to it, naturally accepted Hyde's teaching that a nationality must be distinct in language, and *United Ireland*, the journal founded by William Rooney and Arthur Griffith, attracted much support from the men of letters by reason of the high literary quality which Griffith imparted to it.

Meanwhile Standish O'Grady, from his very different point of view, was preaching to Ireland in an *All Ireland Review* which drew support, though never in paying quantities, from all sorts and conditions of men and women.

But the one among the young writers who had most in common with O'Grady's ideals had been annexed by another movement and provided with a weekly pulpit of his own. This was George Russell now editor of *The Irish Homestead* organ of the Irish Agricultural Organization Society, founded to carry out those principles of co-operation which Horace Plunkett had begun to preach to Irish farmers.

This co-operative movement, like the Gaelic League theoretically non-political, was, like the Gaelic League, on bad terms with the old regular political organization of nationalist Ireland. Plunkett, its chief, was a Unionist member of Parliament and lent himself to the policy of trying to "kill Home Rule by kindness." But his political purpose was always, like O'Grady's, to establish institutions in which Irishmen could work together, and he had especially a touching interest in all literary gifts, and belief in their efficiency. Throughout his long career he was seldom without some young man of letters acting as his personal secretary, and these were often men of nationalist upbringing. When the Department of Agriculture was founded and he became its parliamentary head, he selected as its official chief a brilliant journalist, T. P. Gill, who had been a member of Parnell's party—thus laying up lasting trouble for himself with orthodox Irish Unionism.

But it was in his unofficial capacity, as head of the voluntary organization that Plunkett sought a man who should be able to expound both the moral and financial basis of co-operative principles. His interest in letters had brought him into contact with Yeats and Yeats came to suggest that George Russell then cashier in a Dublin shop, had shown extraordinary gifts as a propagandist in the little society for study of mystical beliefs which then attracted Yeats and others. Plunkett took the advice, and Russell, already a centre and focus by his interest in the occult, now began to make his influence felt through a

paper preaching co-operation, chiefly on ethical grounds, yet always supporting them by skilful use of figures. There has probably been no better journalist at any time than this mystic—who continued to write and to publish mystical verse while he was laying down the doctrine concerning the conduct of creameries, and above all of small mutual-credit-banks. His paper was read by all manner of people because it was readable, it was read by poets, because Russell had such a sympathetic interest in their work that when he opened a provincial newspaper he turned to the poets' corner as other men to the racing news, and in his propagandist travel through Ireland he made contact with would-be poets everywhere, and his influence on them was everywhere formative. More perhaps even to his counsel and encouragement than to the example set by Yeats is due the rapid spread of that skilled technique in verse which had been so lamentably lacking in Ireland.

In short, within the decade after Parnell's death, persons of literary bent in Ireland were aware, first, that Ireland was sadly behind Great Britain in literary distinction, but secondly, that two men at least had appeared of whom much could be hoped; and that activity was spreading. In addition to Katharine Tynan, there came two women writers of note, one of whom, Jane Barlow, was daughter of one of the Senior Fellows of Trinity, and had herself acquired remarkable culture. The first of her books, *Bogland Studies*, is a series of stories told in verse through the mouth of Irish peasants, with full command of peasant idiom, but to each poem is prefixed a quotation from some Greek or Latin writer—by no means familiar quotations. She evidently used the peasant narrator much as the Greek dramatists used the chorus, to set up a philosophy of life. Here is an example from this first book.

“ So whatever misfortins th’ould master experienced, I  
hould in a way  
He’d the bettermost sort o’ bad luck—an’ that’s somethun’  
—because ye may say  
His worst throuble as good as ne’er chanced him , ne’er  
come to his hearin’ or sight,  
And a hurt that ye feel unbeknownst, as the sayin’ is, is  
apt to be light  
An’ bedad he’s well out of it all , it’s ourselves have the  
raison to grieve  
While the say meets the shore, for what happint this Irish  
that black Holy Eve  
But I’ll whisht , for I’m thinkin’ when things have  
determined to run to the bad,  
There’s no use in discoorsin’ and frettin’ save on’y to  
dhrive yourself mad ,  
Since the storms, or the blight, or the runt, comes agin one  
wherever one goes,  
Till one takes the last turnin’ An’ thun if it’s true, as some  
people suppose,  
Better luck follows thum that are lavin’ than thum that are  
bidin’ behind—  
Sure it’s off ye’ll slip one o’ these days, an’ what need to  
be throublin’ your mind , ”

A later book of verse—*Ghost Bereft*—published in 1897, won from Swinburne the most lavish praise Yet in Ireland we were more interested then by her prose studies, *Irish Idylls* and *Strangers at Lisconnel* In them Irish peasant life was treated with a new gravity , humour pervaded the whole, but not the humour that breaks into loud laughter The title of her first volume was an avowal of discipleship , she sought to write of the Irish cottager as Barrie had written of the Scotch It is no dispraise to say that she did not reach his level he wrote of what he was bred among ,



moreover, he wrote with a tautness that few have equalled. Her handling, even in the poems, is too diffuse: yet her verse will, I think, not always be neglected. So powerful and so learned a mind as was allied in this shy little lady to exquisite sensibility, to every form of beauty, will somehow come back to life, perhaps for some of the stories told in verse with such amazing power (Swinburne thought that *Three Throws in One* outdid Victor Hugo), perhaps for something like this, from *Honey-Harvest*

" Guerdon of toil 'mid the blossoms, a rare guerdon,  
Filmy wings quiver questing and murmurous make  
Fragrant air round bud-lips fair, for the dew-pure  
          nectar's sake  
Hid in their bosoms, now the honey-bee's sweet burden.

" Golden the granary's harvest, the hive's golden  
Rapt from troubling of storm-blast, from frost-blight's  
          despair.  
So be wise 'neath smiling skies, so, ere all thy world be  
          bare,  
Store—else thou starvest—store memories dear and  
          olden."

Whether Jane Barlow would have turned to Irish themes, were it not for the movement which then directed all minds in Ireland that way, it is impossible to say: but there was, I think, no personal alliance between her and any of the more prominent writers. She stood no less apart than Miss Lawless, whose *Grania* appeared a year before *England Studies* and *Irish Idylls*. Even more completely aloof from all the centres of organizing activity in Dublin or London was another poetess, about whose popularity there was never any doubt. Moira O'Neill began to write her poems in 1892; they were all published in Blackwood's

*Magazine*, and the Blackwood house finally issued *Songs of the Glens of Antrim*, and continued to reprint it for perhaps a score of editions. It is one of the very few books which, if all copies were destroyed, could probably be reproduced from oral tradition.

MOIRA O'NEILL, in the decades since, has written much else including, some years back, *More Songs from the Glens of Antrim*. But it is by that first book she must always hold place in Irish literature, though her work neither derives from any Irish source, nor (except here and there in Richard Rowley's poems) has left trace through the imitation of others.

Three old books may help to trace the evolution of the self-conscious movement. First is *Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland*, dedicated in 1888 "to John O'Leary and the Young Ireland Societies." Except Miss Barlow and Moira O'Neill and A.E., it contains work by all the poets of whom I have written in this chapter, and also several poems by an older man, John Todhunter, including his ballad "Aghadoc," which is rightly in all Irish anthologies. The last two verses of the dedication—written probably by Rolleston—are significant.

"Because you loved the nobler part  
Of Erin, so we bring you here  
Words such as once the nation's heart  
On patriot's lips rejoiced to hear

"Strains that have little chance to live  
With those that Davis's clarion blew,  
But all the best we have to give  
To mother Erin and to you"

Next comes *The Revival of Irish Literature*, published in 1893, and containing two addresses by Gavan Duffy,

delivered to the Irish Literary Society of London, in which he called on his hearers to take up the work which the famine and exile had interrupted two generations earlier. Then, he said,

“A group of young men, among the most generous and disinterested in our annals, were busy digging up the buried relics of our history, to enlighten the present by a knowledge of the past, setting up on their pedestals anew the overthrown statues of Irish worthies, assailing wrongs which under long impunity had become unquestioned and even venerable, and warming as with strong wine the heart of the people, by songs of valour and hope.”

He stressed the need for books that should teach. “I know no civilized country except Ireland whose history is not familiar to its people.”

After this was a paper by Dr. Sigerson on “Irish Literature Its Origin, Environment, and Influence,” first delivered to the National Literary Society of Dublin. This gave, in abridged form, what was to be found at length in Sigerson’s *Bards of the Gael and Gall*—a study of the form and content of what the native Gael wrote in verse. The volume was completed by Hyde’s paper on “The Necessity for de-Anglicising Ireland”—the means indicated being by a revival and intensive study of the Gaelic language.

In short, the movement aimed in its beginnings at reviving and renewing the work of Davis and his comrades, but with an emphasis on the study of Gaelic which was lacking among the Young Irishmen.

Passing on now to the *Book of Irish Verse*, selected from modern writers, with an introduction and notes by W. B. Yeats, published in 1895, we find a new note struck.

Moore is condemned for "a prettiness that is contraband of Parnassus" poetry has cast him out because he had not distinction of style. The Young Irelanders, Yeats said, 'turned poetry once again into a principal means for spreading ideas of nationality and patriotism, yet their thoughts were a little insincere and their rhythms not seldom mechanical because their purpose was served when they had satisfied the dull ears of the common man. The poets of *The Spirit of the Nation* were of practical and political, not of literary importance. If we have not a passion for literary perfection to be our ark of gopher wood, the deluge of incoherence, vulgarity and triviality will pass over our heads." A finer tradition was to be recognized in the work of Ferguson, Allingham, and de Vere but these men stood apart from the people. "There is more of unity in Irish literary life to-day," Yeats wrote, "than when Ferguson, Allingham, and de Vere were doing their best work. They had not much in common with the Ireland of this day while their successors, Hyde, Lionel Johnson, Rolleston, and Katharine Tynan are trying to understand and influence Irish opinion."

In other words, Yeats felt that a school was being founded and in addition to the writers who 'found their themes in Irish experience, Irish history, and Irish tradition," he mentions the 'little mystical movement" which "has lately begun to make poets." A.E. is quoted. To himself, of course, no reference is made, but all concerned with literature in Ireland knew that the vital question for Irish literature was this: How would Yeats develop?

By this date, 1895, his thirtieth year, he had published not only *The Wanderings of Usheen*, but also the group of poems called *Crossways*, which included two things of an exquisite simplicity—"An Isle in the Water" and "Down by the Sally Gardens"—the latter of them close to the tradition of those anonymous folk-songs for which his

anthology showed so strong a love. He had published also in 1893 a volume called *The Rose*—that is, *Rosa Mystica*—and one poem in it, “To Ireland in the Coming Times,” is most significant for my present purpose for it claims his place in the movement, even while he admits that he followed other lights.

“ Know, that I would accounted be  
True brother of that company,  
Who sang to sweeten Ireland’s wrong,  
Ballad and story, rann and song ;  
Nor be I any less of them,  
Because the red-rose-bordered hem  
Of her, whose history began  
Before God made the angelic clan,  
Trails all about the written page.

“ Nor may I less be counted one  
With Davis, Mangan, Ferguson,  
Because to him, who ponders well,  
My rhymes more than their rhyming tell  
Of things discovered in the deep,  
Where only body’s laid asleep  
For the elemental creatures go  
About my table to and fro,  
That hurry from unmeasured mind  
To rant and rage in flood and wind ”

By 1895 the opinion of all men of letters in these islands was made up about Yeats. In the years from 1887 onwards that he had spent largely in London, as a member of the Rhymes’ Club (“poets with whom I learnt my trade”), his work became known and there was no disputing its quality. It was another question to know what it would be worth to Ireland. His *Usheen* had not moved many

readers. The Ros group contained one thing which from the first caught Irish hearts—his Lake Isle of Innisfree — with its cry of longing for Irish rocks and Irish waters. But to his mysticism Ireland made no response, and if *The Rose* had meant no more than *ros mystica* Yeats would I think have remained simply a distinguished esoteric poet. He had tendencies that way—the normal seemed to him always the obvious and uninteresting. But one of life's most normal experiences brought him in closer touch with average humanity than perhaps he as an artist would have desired—at least in the theory-ridden period of his youth.

In the eighties at the height of the revolutionary period which Parnell embodied there came to Dublin a young woman so completely her own mistress that she could lead the independent life of an art student in the Latin Quarter. Born like Helen or like Deirdre to be a danger and to live dangerously her beauty—because of that great nobleness of hers—was never overprised even by the poet whose recurring theme it was for half a lifetime. Much it would appear and much of the best written for her and about her in early years was not published till later—early theories tied Yeats to express himself for the public through symbols. Yet before the century ended Yeats was already the man who had written the best love poetry of his age. Taking into count what has been added later to that expression of long worship I do not know the poet in any language out of whom more beauty has been wrung by the passion for a woman.

Such poetry reaches all. If Yeats is more than an esoteric the thanks are due to her who inspired it. Yet if he were only a writer of noble love poetry one need not dwell on the person that he wrote of. But he is so much more for Ireland that it is necessary to show how this lady was to him not only an inspiration but a helper. It was

never in her nature to be a looker-on at life's adventures. nationalist of the most ardent kind, she was soon involved in movements of revolt, and not only to her poet but to thousands of Irish folk she was the incarnation of that vision which had cheered the Irish imagination through centuries of defeat—known by endearing names, namely, the Dark Rosaleen, the "Shan van Vocht" or "Cathleen the Daughter of Houlihan." Like all other workers in the movement of which he was the true directing force, Yeats aspired to serve his country. But as a lonely writer of dreamy verse, however beautiful, he could never have given such an impetus as came out of an enterprise whose very essence involved a fellowship of artists. The Irish literary movement really became a force from the day when Yeats entrusted to a company of Irish players the play in which he had brought this embodied vision on to the stage as part of an episode linked to famous memories in Irish history—and when the part of Cathleen ni Houlihan was taken by the woman who had inspired it

## CHAPTER IX

### BEGINNINGS OF THE IRISH DRAMA

IN the period during which the Irish literary movement began to develop itself, the neighbouring island of Great Britain—rightly or wrongly—felt no need of a renaissance in poetry or in prose. Even though Tennyson and Browning were ageing, Thackeray, Dickens, and Carlyle dead, the Victorian age had plenty to show. But from about the time of the Queen's first Jubilee there were voices of discontent cavilling at 'those illiterate institutions called theatres.' This particular voice was an Irish one, that of Mr. George Moore publishing (in 1886) his *Confessions of a Young Man*. Within a couple of years another Irishman, Oscar Wilde, had brought on to the English stage a more finished wit than had been heard there since the time of Sheridan. Before Sheridan that other Irishman Goldsmith had brought back what he called 'nature' to the theatre in the days of Garrick. Before Goldsmith there was Farquhar, and before him Congreve, whose schooldays and college days were passed in Ireland. Ireland's contribution to English literature had been more conspicuous in this department than any other. These works do not belong to the literature which is distinctively Irish—Wilde's no more than Sheridan's—but he and Sheridan were both witty in a way that was no more English than Barrie's humour. But Barrie came out of a school as they did not, and Barrie began with intensive studies of his own township.



Wilde's career as a dramatist was short, and in the following decade even more need was felt for a less merely commercial drama. In 1891 the "Independent Theatre Society" was established by the critic J. T. Grein, backed by certain other theatre lovers—among them Miss Horniman. This organization produced the first Ibsen play seen in England. In 1894 they produced a comedy by George Bernard Shaw, an Irishman who since 1876 had been living in London by writing and lecturing, largely in connection with socialist propaganda. Along with this first Shaw play was given *The Land of Heart's Desire*, an exquisite fantasy in dialogue form by Yeats. Literary people with one accord desired to see more of Shaw's plays, but the general public associated his name with Ibsen's and were vehemently prejudiced against both. As to the Yeats play, its beauty was recognized, but not less the lack of dramatic quality was felt.

It is significant that the theatrical work of these two Irishmen, who were to carry the fame of Irish genius farther than any others of their age and who were to contribute most—Shaw directly, Yeats indirectly—to a revival of dramatic literature in the English language, should have been produced for the first time simultaneously, not less significant that it should have been produced in London. London was in a sense everybody's country. Both men had in the first instance to meet the passive resistance of a torpid indifference, mere distaste for the unfamiliar. New ideas were unfamiliar and unwelcome on the stage, poetry was unfamiliar and unwelcome. Wit indeed was welcome, but the mass of mankind, accustomed to a theatre where they went to be amused, resented the idea of being asked to think—and admittedly Ibsen asked this of his audiences, while Shaw was even more importunate. Englishmen were not prepared to believe that they could be at the same time amused and forced to review their established prejudices.

Several years had to go by before any regular theatre would take the risk of putting on one of Shaw's comedies although at least half a dozen of them—produced privately by the Stige Society, which took up the work of the Independent Theatre—proved to thousands of people that nothing so witty had been seen on the boards within living memory. Ultimately, however the chance was given, and London always ready to be diverted, laughed to its heart's content with Shaw, London even began to find pleasure in finding its established notions challenged.

Strictly speaking, Shaw's plays do not belong to the Irish literary movement. His preoccupation was not with Irish problems but with those that met him in the vastly larger field of Great Britain. On the other hand he was not interested in them as English problems, they were questions for humanity. Intellectually speaking his mind was completely international. It abhorred arbitrary frontiers imposed by politics. On the other hand, his mind was un-English, with the special note of hostility that is Irish, with a resentment largely due to England's traditionally patronizing attitude to the Irish. Goldsmith, a century and a half earlier expressing his contempt for minds that "think in track" expressed what lay deepest in Shaw. It was as natural for an Irishman to seek to get out of ruts as it was for Tennyson or Trollope to accept such useful guidance. Shaw was rabidly logical, with an inborn loathing of compromise. Logic made him international. There was however a flaw in his logic which made him irrationally and aggressively proud of being an Irishman. Ireland, aware of this took an interest in him even felt pride in him, and was delighted when he made war on the most cherished convictions of English respectability—without considering whether a highly conservative and Catholic country had any fundamental sympathy with this born heretic.

The service which Shaw rendered to literary progress in Ireland was that he more than any one stimulated the desire for a theatre of ideas not merely of box returns ; and Yeats, already attracted to this form of art, set others in motion. He had made friends with Miss Florence Farr, an actress whose speaking of verse enchanted him, and had formed the idea of getting a little theatre somewhere in the suburbs to produce plays. Ibsen had created an interest in what was then called realism—something that should bring about a sharper and more intelligent appreciation of the actual motives and desires which give significance to daily life, and should replace the usual complications conventionally regarded as dramatic. Yeats held that audiences could be found who would desire the presentment of scenes and personages and emotions evoking strange unfamiliar beauty and terror, such as he had created in his *Land of Heart's Desire*, and in 1898 he came in touch with one of those who were to be his chief associates. Meeting Lady Gregory, he expounded his views to her ; but she, instead of approving the London scheme, suggested an Irish theatre—which Yeats had put out of mind as impossible for lack of money. But Lady Gregory undertook to find guarantees for a performance in Dublin of Yeats's play *The Countess Cathleen*, and of Edward Martyn's *The Heather Field*, under the auspices of a society to be called "The Irish Literary Theatre." Guarantees were secured from Irishmen and Irishwomen of every shade of opinion in religion and politics ; for the literary movement had made itself widely felt. Cultivated Irish people were proud of Yeats, of Jane Barlow, Emily Lawless, Moira O'Neill, and Katharine Tynan (for the poetesses were in the ascendant) , and they began to be aware of A.E. Edward Martyn they did not know as a writer, but knew him to be a landlord, wealthy by Irish standards, and of old Catholic family in County Galway—a neighbour of Lady Gregory, and a

kinsman and friend of George Moore Moore's assistance was considered to be of value in bringing together the cast of English players

George Moore was known in Ireland as people are known there in relation to his Irish background His father George Henry Moore owner of a beautiful house and an estate in a very wild district of Mayo had been first illustrious as one of the boldest of gentlemen riders and luckier than his brother Augustus who broke his neck in the Grand National of 1845 Both these brothers were men of culture very unusual in their class Further when—in 1846 at the height of the famine—Moore's mare Coranna won the Chester Cup and brought him ten thousand pounds he used this windfall to keep alive the multitudes of his starving tenantry not only that but he mobilized the Irish gentry for a meeting which called on the Government to prohibit export of food stuffs and sacrifice any sum that might be required to save the people from destruction He went into parliament and for ten years tried to induce the Irish landlord-class to make common cause with the people instead of leaving leadership to the priests He failed but his name was remembered among the champions of Ireland At his death in 1870 George Moore his eldest son a lad of eighteen succeeded to the property but all his interests and ambitions were allied to art and for several years his life was spent in Paris among artists and writers He also was an Irishman disinclined to think in track or follow the usual routine but with him originality took the form of plunges from one track into another His mind was gregarious but inconstant and when he gave up the attempt to be a punter following what was then the dominant French school he plunged into the rising school of realism in literature Leaving Paris for London after some excursions in verse he set himself to become a writer after the model of Zola and in 1884

acquired at least notoriety by his novel *A Munster's Wife*. Ten years later he published *Esther Waters*, and attained a real success. In this book he utilized his early familiarity with a training stable to furnish a background for this story of seduction, yet the racing establishment was placed not in Mayo but on the English Downs. In 1888 his *Confessions of a Young Man* had been outspoken on his attitude to Ireland. "Two dominant notes in my character—an original hatred of my native country, and a brutal loathing of the religion I was brought up in. All the aspects of my native country are violently disagreeable to me, and I cannot think of the place I was born in without a feeling akin to nausea. . . . The English I love, and with a love that is foolish—mad, limitless, I love them better than the French, but I am not so near to them. Dear sweet Protestant England. . . . England is Protestantism, Protestantism is England. Protestantism is strong, clean and westernly, Catholicism is eunuch-like, dirty and Oriental."

Two of the books written before this, *A Drama in Muslim* and *Parnell and his Island*, were, it will be easily imagined, not of a kind to endear their author to Ireland. Plainly Martyn and Yeats were enlisting a dangerous ally—and not, at first, a willing one. Moore's own account, in what some hold—I think rightly—to be his true masterpiece, *Hail and Farewell*, cannot be taken as literally exact, but certain points in it give sure guidance. As early as 1894 Martyn had been caught by the Gaelic movement and was expressing a wish that he could write in Irish. The lure of a language at once old and new, unhackneyed in the common road of journalistic English, had been at once felt by him. Yeats, a more practical artist, had seen, in the translations from Irish, glimpses of possible paths offered to one who should seek after the freshness of a peasant speech in which English had taken on new colours from the Gaelic mind and Gaelic idiom. To this extent

the literary revival had been affected, even for those who knew no Irish by Hyde's propaganda. We can see also that Moore succumbed at first simply because he could never resist putting his finger into any new literary pie, that he was glad to show his knowledge of the theatrical world, and so helped to get competent actors, trained in the orthodox tradition. Yeats had indeed his own ideas as to how verse should be spoken, but Moore waved him aside and the plays, rehearsed to some degree under his direction, were sent over to Dublin to be presented at the Ancient Concert Rooms, because no theatre was free.

Unfortunately difficulties of an unforeseen character arose. Martyn's play in prose was an attempt to see an Irish subject in the manner of Ibsen and this study of an Irish landowner who sought to regenerate Ireland by turning barren heath into tillage land and flung his whole fortune into the vain struggle, offended no one. Whatever might be symbolized by the implacable resurgence of wild nature remained too vague to give offence, and Martyn was the most devout of Catholics. Yeats however, was not. In his first published volume, the turn given by him to the old story was not that of the actual Irish sagas. They represent Ossian rebellious at first and inclined to vaunt the glory of Finn MacCool against any imaginable God, but in the end the old pagan sinks into submission whereas with Yeats, his last words are words of revolt.

' It were sad to gaze on the blessed and no man I loved of  
old there ,  
I throw down the chain of small stones When life in  
my body has ceased,  
I will go to Cioilte and Conan, and Bran, Sgeolan  
*Lomair*  
And dwell in the house of the Fenians, be they in flames  
or at feast "

In the *Land of Heart's Desire* Yeats had dramatized a story of the old belief that mortal women may be carried off from their homes into fairy land, drawn by the promise of a world

“Where nobody grows old and crafty and wise,  
Where nobody grows old and bitter of tongue.”

And it was obvious enough that the poet's sympathy went out to the beautiful girl who could not resign herself to settling into the rut of common life with its common love and tenderness at the narrow hearthside. That poem, as we can all see now, was inspired by the too adventurous woman to whom he had dedicated the other and longer play in verse which was now to be produced for the Irish National Theatre. *The Countess Cathleen* had been published in 1892, and therefore Ireland knew what was to be played in 1898. The central figure was again a beautiful young woman, beset by those spirit powers in whom Ireland had never wholly ceased to believe; but this time the story (though Yeats had come upon it in an Irish newspaper, given as an Irish folk tale) did not come from the normal store of Irish legend. It told of a Christian Ireland in the grip of famine through which evil spirits went about offering gold for the price of souls; and it told of famished people crowding to the market. It told how the young Countess pledged all her wealth to buy food and so defeat the devils, till by subtlety a devil broke into her treasury and robbed it, leaving her with one resource only: to barter away her own soul, and by its loss redeem her people from the bargain. For Yeats it was natural to conceive that a woman so high-hearted as the one whom certainly he had in mind and to whom he dedicated the poem, would be deterred by no risk on an errand of mercy, not even if it were the loss of her own soul. The Countess dies, and in the last

scene of the poem it is revealed to her poet that the devils are defeated her passage is "to the floor of peace," because "The Light of Lights looks always on the motive not the deed" But it was equally natural that Catholic Ireland should be somewhat shocked by approval of one who, for any motive, trafficked with her soul

In 1845 Catholic priests had been suspicious of an intellectual movement headed by young laymen, even though as many leaders in it were Catholics as Protestants, and they had denounced Young Ireland for sympathy with revolutionary France Now they were confronted with a new literary movement in which the inspiration came almost entirely from Protestants Differences of opinion on the permanent value of Young Ireland's literature had made a rift between old Gavan Duffy and these younger men, and perhaps some jealousy of intellectual arrogance was at work as well as fears for Catholic belief At all events, before the performance, a pamphlet called *Souls for Gold* was circulated, which denounced the play as being anti-Irish and anti-Catholic Catholic students were urged to attend and protest, and after the first play-house riot, police were called in to protect the Irish Literary Theatre There was public controversy, and Cardinal Logue condemned the play as dangerous to faith, admitting in the same letter that he had not read it This was the first contest that Yeats had to fight against the crude censorship of Irish public feeling, which, as W G Fay says, asked concerning every Irish play produced in Dublin two questions Was it "an insult to the Faith"? Was it "a slander on the people of Ireland"? In truth, as Yeats himself has recently said, "Nationalist Ireland at that time was torn with every kind of political passion and prejudice, wanting, in so far as it wanted any literature at all, Nationalist propaganda disguised as literature"

When, for a second time in 1900, the Irish Literary



Theatre gave performances, Yeats produced no play. the three given were *Maeve*, by Edward Martyn; the *Bending of the Bow*, by George Moore (a political satire); and *The Last Feast of the Fianna*, by Alice Milligan. The actors were again all English.

In 1901 the task of production was entrusted to the Benson Company, who performed at the Gaiety Theatre a version of the story of "Diarmuid and Grania," in which Yeats and Moore had collaborated. After it came a new and wholly different venture. Hyde had written in Irish a play of Irish peasant life, called *The Twisting of the Rope*, and it was played by a company of amateurs with Hyde himself in the principal part—that of a Connacht poet who has made his way into a house and domineers intolerably over the assembled neighbours. They dare not put him out of doors because of the ill-luck it would bring on them to be inhospitable to a bard, so they have to play on his vanity till, in showing these stupid Munstermen how to twist a hay-rope, he steps over the threshold still twisting it, and the door is shut in his face.

The thing was not more dramatic than one of de Musset's *Proverbes*, which in some ways it recalled; but after five-and-thirty years it remains alive in my memory, while the play by two accomplished writers which a very capable English company performed has left nothing but a blank. Yet the alliance of Yeats and Moore as collaborators was not more genial than that of English actors and Irish playwrights in an Irish play. In *The Twisting of the Rope*, play and players combined naturally.

If Irish dramatic art has to-day a celebrity throughout the English-speaking world, and even beyond it, that is due as much to Irish actors as to Irish dramatists. We know from the pioneer among these actors that the early experiments of Irish dramatists producing plays in Dublin lit up the way for him.

W G Fay and his elder brother Frank were sons of a clerk in the Dublin Education Office, the elder became a clerk also, though in private employ. Both lads were stage-struck, devourers of old plays and haunters of the gallery. They acted in private when and wherever they could. W G Fay also dabbled in scene-painting, while his elder brother concentrated on the art of voice production. When a strolling player set up a temporary dramatic school in Dublin, both joined it, and when she and her husband took the road again, playing the old Boucicault dramas, the younger brother, who had no regular job in Dublin, went with them as advance agent. The next time he went out with a company it was as actor. Meanwhile in Dublin Frank Fay, devoting all his spare time to his passion, had established an 'Ormond Dramatic Society' of amateurs mainly recruited from clerks and shop assistants. One of its members was Dudley Digges, later a star at Holywood, who began his professional career by taking lessons in elocution from Frank Fay at half a crown a month. The company was presently strengthened by W G Fay, who, after a couple more outings on the road, settled down in Dublin as a working electrician. All this had happened before the two brothers went together to the Ancient Concert Rooms, curious to see an Irish play that was not a melodrama like the *Colleen Bawn* or *Count the Shaughraun* and came away enthusiastic alike for the play and the players. Yet they felt something missing, and realized that to get the full value of the *Countess Cathleen*, native actors were needed.

In 1901, when *The Twisting of the Rope* was produced George Moore, who had undertaken to produce it, handed over the task to W G Fay, who first of all rehearsed it in English and found that he "could get the same acting value out of the play whether it was spoken in English or Gaelic", while meantime he saw the Benson company sadly at a loss

with *Diamond and Grena*. The ambition grew in him to produce with his own amateur company a literary Irish play, and very shortly after he saw two acts of a work called *Deirdre* published in Standish O'Grady's *All Ireland Review*. They were signed "A E"; the unknown author was sought out and asked whether he could not furnish the missing third act. This was agreed. Miss Máire Quinn was to act *Deirdre*. She had been playing in Gaiety pieces produced by the "Daughters of Ireland," whose president was Maud Gonne, and presently Yeats offered to supplement the programme by his one-act *Cathleen in Houlahan*, in which he had persuaded Miss Gonne to take the part written for her and about her. The performance was given in the hall of St. Teresa's Total Abstinence Association in Clarendon Street. The cast included—over and above the two Fays, Dudley Digges, and Miss Quinn—a very beautiful young woman, Máire ni Shuublaigh (Mary Waller), a beautiful young man called Padraic Colum, then a railway clerk, another poet, J. H. Cousins, and Frederic Ryan, a writer of socialist tendencies. The dates of the three performances were April 2, 3, and 4, 1902, and they are memorable in the history of Irish drama.

Success was startling: audiences, largely of the working classes, crowded in, and, since the Irish Literary Theatre had died either from inanition or from a surfeit of George Moore, it was proposed to organize an Irish National Dramatic Society. Yeats was chosen President, with A. E., Douglas Hyde, and Maud Gonne as Vice-Presidents. Its membership included, in addition to the cast of the first performance, "Honor Lavalle" (later Mrs. Curran), who created the rôle of the mother in *Riders to the Sea*, Seumas O'Sullivan, already commencing poet, and George Roberts, then also writing poetry but afterwards well known as an Irish publisher. It was thus a small, self-governing society

of amateurs, electing its own officers. Only the Fays had any professional experience.

At a second venture in December 1902 they produced a quadruple bill. *The Laying of Foundations*, a satire on municipal politics, by Fred Ryan, the *Racing Lug*, by James Cousins, a Gaelic trifle by Peadar MacGinley, and *The Pot of Broth*, a fable dramatized in peasant talk by Yeats, in which Fay for the first time showed his full talent as a comedian. It became a popular favourite, but, at the time, Ryan's play excited more interest. Moore in *The Bending of the Bough*, Martyn in *The Tale of a Town*, had written satires on Irish politicians, they knew how Ibsen had done that sort of thing. But they lacked the intimate familiarity with local types which is the salt of such productions, and Ryan had this. His play was a new departure, as it came from a nationalist organization, and hitherto criticism of the Dublin Corporation (nationalist controlled) was held to be playing England's game, just as was criticism of an overbearing parish priest. Yet here now was Ireland in a play written for Ireland only, Ireland speaking out its thought and chastising its own corruption, without considering at all of what England might hear and might say. It was a new freedom, a new force loose, the sword of ridicule.

In March 1903 the company produced at the Molesworth Hall Yeats's morality play, *The Hourglass*, and *Twenty-five*, the first of Lady Gregory's many pieces. In the following May the Irish Literary Society had the honour of bringing them to London, to be seen in the Queen's Gate Hall, before a very limited audience.

All the actors had to earn their living by various jobs in Dublin and could at most get the Saturday off. They had to travel on Friday night, get the stage and scenery ready for a matinee at two, play a triple bill twice in the day, and travel back on the Sunday. Only one piece was

repeated in the bill five one-act plays were shown, they had as yet no dramatist equal to providing a full-length drama. The Queen's Gate Hall, at that time, probably would hold two hundred comfortably, and at these performances held at least fifty more, but the audience included London's foremost critics. It was A. B. Walkley who most clearly divined that he saw not only a new type of play but a new style of acting. He was impressed by the power of the players "to stand still and not do any fussy movements when they are not speaking. They just stay where they are and listen. When they move, it is without premeditation, at haphazard and even with a little natural clumsiness as of people who are not conscious of being stared at in public. Hence a delightful effect of spontaneity, and in their demeanour they have the artless impulsiveness of children." Fay adds "Walkley was, I think, the only critic to see immediately what Frank and I were driving at—not of course in the purely peasant pieces but in the serious and poetic plays, viz. to enforce the most rigid economy of gesture and movement, to make the speaking quite abstract, and at the same time to keep a music in it by having all the voices harmonized."

The style of acting identified with the Abbey Theatre is due to the genius of the Fays—and of W. G. Fay especially. Frank Fay had much to do with the speaking of words but in both these directions, the instinct of the actors got full support from Yeats, who was the central figure and true driving force of the movement. Such a force attracts other forces; it is a rallying point, and up to this no one but Yeats had given the Irish players anything of account to play. A. E.'s *Deirdre* did not raise more than curiosity in me; and my reactions had a certain importance, as I suggested and organized the London visit. But the effect of *Cathleen in Houlahan* on me was that I went home asking myself if such plays should be produced unless

one was prepared for people to go out to shoot and be shot Yeats was not alone responsible, no doubt but Lady Gregory helped him to get the peasant speech so perfect, but above all, Miss Gonne's impersonation had stirred the audience as I have never seen another audience stirred. At the height of her beauty, she transformed herself there into one of the half-mad old crones whom we were accustomed to see by Irish roadsides, and she spoke as they spoke, in a half-crazy chant. But the voice in which she spoke, a voice that matched her superb stature and carriage, had rich flexibility and power to stir and to stimulate, and the words which she spoke were the words of a masterpiece. Yeats has said somewhere that his defect as a dramatist is that normal men do not interest him, but here in one brief theme he had expressed what a hundred others have tried to do, the very spirit of a race for ever defeated and for ever insurgent against defeat. He had linked this expression with the picture of a perfectly normal Irish household group, the small farmer, greedy for more land, his wife even more set on gain than he, their son who is about to marry, and the girl who is to bring her portion with herself. The old wandering woman who comes in, welcomed to the hearth because it would not be lucky to turn her away at such a time, speaks at first in riddling words, yet the meaning of them is plain to any Irish audience. The name that she gives herself belongs to a past half-faded out of memory, the past in which Irish poets wrote songs in Irish, yet it wakens an echo in the present. "Some have called me Cathleen the daughter of Houlihan." "I think I knew some one of that name once," says Peter Gillane. "It must be some one I knew when I was a boy." The audience was quick to catch the implication—memory of a nation's youth, memory of a man's youthful generosity, half-forgotten later. But the song that rebel Ireland had made for itself when Ireland was

grown English-speaking was a song about "The Poor Old Woman," and all Ireland knew the "Shan van Vocht" "Oh, the French are in the bay, says the Shan van Vocht." What bay: Killala Bay, where Humbert landed in 1798. A bay, half of whose shores belong to Yeats's own county of Sligo. and there and then he set his scene. The old woman had been talking to the young bridegroom, saying to him such things as indeed the one who spoke the words has spent her life saying to the young men and young women of Ireland. "They that have red cheeks shall have pale cheeks, for my sake. and yet they will think themselves well paid." As she speaks, a far-off noise of cheering is heard; the old woman rises, still bent and weighed down with years or centuries, but for one instant, before she went out at the half-door, she drew herself up to her superb height; change was manifest, *patuit dea*. Then in an instant the younger son of the house rushes in crying out. "The French are in the bay! they are landing at Killala!" and such a thrill went through the audience as I have never known in any other theatre. Such a thrill these words could waken only in an Irish audience—and indeed that audience was largely composed of Miss Gonne's ultra-nationalist following. Only one thing was needed to drive home the symbolism. "Did you meet an old woman and you coming up the road?" the mother says. "No," the boy answers, "but I met a young woman and she had the walk of a queen."

Many performances in many countries have shown that this little masterpiece can produce its effect even to strangers, but the original creation of the part and the original creator of it gave a singular impulse. They made a live thing, a true expression of the life of Ireland, out of what had been a literary experiment.

For the other outstanding success of these early ventures, Yeats again was chiefly to praise, and in this he had no

help from tradition. *The Hoglass* came straight out of his peculiar genius and its power and its beauty made their own effect. Dudley Digges helped masterfully by his playing of *The Wise Man* but M'ure in *Shuublaigh* is the angel gave to the piece a special distinction. Her pale wedge shaped beautiful face might have been conceived by one of the Italian primitives and her outline had the rigidity that went with it. Poetry and acting and the simply planned background of curtains all were fused in a true unity. Whoever was responsible there was a touch of genius in this production.

After the success in London men and women of general culture in Dublin began to take the National Theatre seriously. But they were not numerous and as Mr Malone points out in his book on *The Irish Drama* Catholic even more than Protestant Ireland had a Puritan prejudice against the stage. This was easily aroused and in the course of that same year it showed itself. Yeats had found what was most needed a real dramatist but in finding Synge he found trouble.

Synge was the son of a clergyman in County Wicklow who after graduating in Trinity went wandering to Paris. There Yeats met him and was struck by his talent but being then full of the belief that Irishmen must seek their inspiration from Irish sources and the nearer the soil and the nearer the old language the better he advised the young writer to make the Aran islands his place of study. In Aran Synge learnt Irish but he learnt also the colour which is given to English by minds trained in Irish speech. All phrasing in Ireland is more pictorial than in English but certainly those western regions give to English a quality of their own and from this Synge built up an English style of which an Irish writer has said recently that it was a richer speech than any since the tongue of Shakespeare. The rhythms of it were as complex and elaborate as that of



any verse, and Fay, who dwells on the difficulty of speaking it, says that "the lines had a balance of their own and went with a kind of lilt"

It was never realistic dialogue. All Synge's work is essentially fantastic. He was neither Gael nor peasant by origin, but he had by choice associated much with peasant folk—yet hardly with peasants proper, who have house and holding and are fixed to the soil. His sympathies lay with the roving folk, tinkers and beggars, and with the strange community of Aran folk—fishermen using the frailest craft among the most monstrous manifestations of wind and cliff and sea. He had no concern with the settled life of Ireland.

The first play by him to be produced had a tramp for its central figure, and in the home that he enters, the tramp finds a woman in revolt against the tediousness of life "in the shadow of the Glen," beside an old husband "who would be wheezing the like of a sick sheep" close to her ear. The old husband is shamming dead so that he might catch his wife carrying on with a neighbouring young farmer, but, when he rises out of the dead-clothes, the young farmer shows himself "a quiet man, God help him", and the woman takes the tramp's offer and goes out, "to be feeling the cold, and the frost, and the great rain, and the sun again, and the south wind blowing in the glen." Yeats, who had been accused of slandering the Irish people by showing them ready to sell their souls, was now accused of holding them up to contempt as makers of loveless marriages, and even of breeding women who will go off with a tramp. Respectable Catholics began to avoid the National Theatre, and the left wing revolutionary Nationalists were taught by Arthur Griffiths in his *United Irishman* that Yeats and his crew were enemies of Ireland.

No objection, however, was raised to Yeats's play, *The King's Threshold*, in which a poet brings a king to

submission by "fasting on him", and for this play Miss Horniman provided the costumes. She had followed the work of Yeats with attention since the Independent Theatre produced his *Land of Heart's Desire*.

In December 1903 another new dramatist was found—Padraic Colum, and his kindly play of peasant life, by an Irish Catholic, was kindly received. In the cast there figured an actress then little known—Sara Allgood.

Next year began with Yeats's *Shadowy Waters*, that, for all its beauty, could never be successful on any stage, in February came a revival of *Deirdre*, followed by Synge's *Riders to the Sea*—a brief masterpiece whose quality has never been challenged, even in Ireland. It was probably the piece which made most impression when a second visit to London enabled the company to show five plays this time in a regular theatre. Success was even more decisive than before, and brought an invitation for the company to make part of the Irish section in the International Exhibition at St. Louis. What the society had to refuse, three leading players accepted, and so Digges, Miss Quinn, and P. J. Kelly were wafted from the status of gifted amateurs into a prosperous professional career, out of Ireland. At the moment the loss seemed ruinous, for Digges had what neither of the Fays possessed, a fine stature and presence, and he could act comedy as well as the romantic parts.

On the other hand Miss Horniman now decided to carry out her intention of providing a small theatre in Dublin to be at the Company's disposal, and so, at her cost, the Abbey Theatre was constructed and taken over by the Irish National Theatre Society, which in 1905 was made into a limited liability company. But the Abbey opened its doors for the first time on December 27, 1904, with a quadruple bill—reviving *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *In the Shadow of the Glen* producing for the first time Yeats's blank verse play about Cuchulain and his son—*On Baile's*

*Strand*, and, what mattered more for prosperity—Lady Gregory's successful farce *Spreading the News*. Fay notes in his book that a young actor made his first appearance in the poetic play, though his fame was to be gained in very different parts—Arthur Sinclair.

Henceforward the Irish dramatic movement was fairly launched, it never lacked talent of writers or talent of actors; encouragement and applause were always heaped on it wherever there was a centre of literary intelligence beyond the Irish Channel. But what it still lacked in Dublin for a long time was an audience naturally responsive as that which had listened to the first performance of the *Cathleen ni Houlihan*.

Men and women of intelligence from both camps were constant in the stalls—the admirably cheap stalls: not only the *intelligentsia*, as the phrase goes, but an orthodox Tory judge like Sir John Ross or an equally orthodox leader of land agitation like John Dillon. But the less intelligent mass, whether of Catholic or Protestant bourgeois gentry, preferred the commercial theatre, and the working class left the gallery empty. In short, though the theatre was created in less than ten years it took thirty to create the public. One reason certainly is that although nearly all the actors were Catholic Irish, the directing intelligence of Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge was non-Catholic, and the fact that the theatre was financed by a non-Catholic added to suspicion in a suspicious country.

## CHAPTER X

### DEVELOPMENT OF PROSE FICTION

ONE notable effect of the Irish literary movement had been to implant in George Moore's mind the conviction that Dublin had superseded London as an intellectual centre, and that the way of salvation lay through Gaelic—even if it only led back to a revived and reinvigorated English style. Moore's convictions were always passionate while they lasted and for something over ten years Ireland in one form or other afforded him his themes, while his dwelling-place was in Dublin. His work of this period must be regarded as a product of the movement, though he was rather of those who were influenced than among the forces which added to its impetus.

Driving force came from the poets Yeats and A E Hyde, in a secondary sense a poet also, whose natural expression was through verse, had become by this time almost exclusively a propagandist of the language revival, perhaps a poet lost, yet by nature too careless of form ever to have added much to lasting literature. Yeats, however, while leading the attempt to establish an Irish drama in concert with a growing school of actors, continued to produce his own poetry to which maturing power constantly added thews and sinews and his work found many imitative echoes. A E also, while continuing to write, became for the young poets a centre of oral inspiration and instruction. There was published in 1904 a volume called *New Songs selected by A E from the Poems of Padraic Colum*,

*Eva Gore Booth, Thomas Keohler, Alice Milligan, Susan Mitchell, Seumas O'Sullivan, George Roberts, and Ella Young*—"Eight people I never heard of," E. V. Lucas said to me, "and they all write so confoundedly well" Colum and O'Sullivan, thirty years later, were to be original members of the Irish Academy of Letters, almost all of the eight have their place in several anthologies—though Susan Mitchell will be always best remembered by her *Aids to the Immortality of Certain Persons Charitably Administered*—light-hearted pasquinades on Yeats, Martyn, and chiefly on George Moore

Nothing comparable to the crop of verse was as yet seen in the field of prose Ireland, which by the time the Abbey Theatre opened its doors began to take rank among notable centres of dramatic and poetic art, was by general admission left behind in the dominant form of literary effort—it was counted to have no novelists. But Moore, first drawn towards Dublin by his involvement with the Irish Literary Theatre, brought with him the reputation of an established master in prose fiction, and when he abandoned the drama, naturally enough his own instinct and the urging of others prompted him to provide Ireland with that in which her literature was lacking.

Moore was always a centre of discussion, particularly on matters of art, and the first project mooted was to produce short stories which, being translated into Irish, might give the Gael something to read more modern than the folk tale. We have the result in *The Untilled Field*, a group of studies, masterly in form, which present a picture of Ireland as Moore saw it: a country from which all the pleasantness of life was banished by a Puritan priesthood where there was lamentably little money, yet a great deal spent on the endowment of religion; consequently, a country where the ruling desire of all active young men and women was to escape to freer life in the United States. "Melancholy as

bog water and as ineffectual ", that phrase sums up Moore's criticism of Irish life. The stories all bear their date on the face of them. The intellectuals of that period in Ireland dismissed the idea of any important political advance. But they counted it possible to prepare for " a generous uprush of wisdom in its poets and thinkers. It was not in the interest of the Spiritual authorities in Ireland that such advances should be realized. a new movement of the human mind in Ireland was indeed precisely what was feared ". To provide leadership in such a movement was started "*Dana*, a magazine of independent thought," under the editorship of John Eglinton, whose description of the period is here quoted (from his *Irish Literary Portraits*), and in *Dana* Moore's stories appeared.

History has made its comment. Another generation saw this same ineffectual people successfully in revolt against all authority, not excluding the ecclesiastical, but Moore gave an exaggeration, justifiable in the artistic sense, of a state of things then to be found in the outlying parts of Ireland. Almost any of the tales might have been based on an anecdote of facts which he had heard.

After these stories, the novelist's mind, dwelling on Irish scenes and conceivable Irish situations, presented him with the material for a novel of full length, in which interest should reside not in the narrative but in the evolution of character. *The Lake* tells how a parish priest in the West of Ireland, finding that his too attractive school-mistress is about to bear an illegitimate child, drives her out of his parish with pulpit denunciation, and then gradually discovers that jealousy has been his real motive, that he is in love with this young woman, who has become a rich man's mistress. Finally, after long correspondence with her, he decides to fly from the ties of his priestly office, not hoping to join the girl, for she is gone beyond his reach but simply to be free.

*The Lake* is technically an accomplished piece of work, yet it lacks native savour. In Ireland partisanship is common, passionate, and inveterate, but Moore, becoming a partisan of Ireland against England and of Gaelic against English, took up partisanship as a passing craze. When he used his talent to interpret the country with which he had identified himself, Ireland either ignored or repudiated his interpretation. Indeed, his actions while in Ireland made clear his lack of comprehension. Normally Protestantism and Catholicism represent different attitudes of mind, and in Great Britain or the United States a Catholic becoming a Protestant would be held by the public at large to have obeyed a purely religious or intellectual impulse. In Ireland, Protestants so long enjoyed a position of privilege—it paid so well to become a Protestant—that no man or woman could make this change without incurring a stigma of bribed desertion. Yet Moore, as he tells us himself, proposed to provide for the education of his brother's children on condition that they were brought up as Protestants, and could not understand the resentment with which this was received. A man having no ear for music is well advised to avoid discussion of music's influence, yet Moore was perpetually discussing in his novels the effects of religion on life. The Ireland that he saw was a country where men and women, in unusual proportion to the population, took vows of celibacy. Conflict between religion and sexual instinct, he held, must therefore be frequent; and in *The Lake* he sets out to show us how religion is assailed, not by gross sensual desire but by woman's subtler effect on the adventurous mind and the passion for beauty. Unfortunately, an Irish reader, though well aware that many an Irish priest has succumbed to sexual temptation, will almost certainly say that neither such a priest nor such a school-mistress as Moore depicts ever drew breath in the province of Connaught. A no. 1st.

if he is to succeed, must make himself believed as, for a notable instance, Moore did in *Esther Waters*. That book, however, lay outside the Irish movement as an example to Irish writers it was worth only what the work of any other English novelist might have been. In short, Moore's value in the Irish movement was not, I think, formative. What literature owes to his stay in Ireland during those years is a masterly sketch of the leading persons in the movement, which preserves his own quality as a talker.

His three volumes, *Ave*, *Salve*, and *Vale*, are written in a prose that keeps the very accent of a witty Irishman. Of all considerable writers, Moore is perhaps the most imitative, his early work is modelled on Zola, his later very largely on Walter Pater, but in these autobiographic volumes he is no one but himself. Sketching his experience, he sketches his progressive reactions to the literary movement and its chiefs, and so enables us to trace the emergence of their personalities.

Yet Moore's volumes contain no reference at all to two contemporary writers whose value has been increasingly admitted by serious critics—though the literary hierarchy of Dublin regarded it with disdain. Only Jane Barlow recognized at once the high accomplishment of the collaborators, Edith Somerville and "Martin Ross." It is true that from the first their purpose was to amuse, and that from the first they wrote, as Maria Edgeworth did, from the Anglo-Irish standpoint, knowing Ireland in Cork and in Galway far too well not to see their own class, the Protestant landlord gentry, surrounded by a Catholic peasantry who, on matters of life and death, were bound together to secrecy. The land war, whose acutest phase was ended before they began to write, had made the separation of classes sharper than ever, for it was by the unbreakable closeness of the tenants' League that the land-



lords had been deprived of their old feudal power. Yet there remained from the feudal times some of the feudal feeling. and every big house had its retainers who, unless politics intervened, stood for the House against the world. Also, between the old gentry and the peasantry intermediate types existed, and in the first novel which the collaborators published, attention was centred on these. *The Reel Charlotte*, probably the most powerful novel of Irish life ever written, was published in 1898, about the time when the Irish Literary Theatre was beginning. Charlotte Mullins the "Gombeens woman," money lender and owner of slum property, might be a descendant of Thady Quirk's prosperous son Jason. Charlotte had moved from the Irish camp into the Anglo-Irish one, and held her footing there by her brains. Outside of Balzac, there are few such studies of a malignant, powerful, scheming woman. and yet Charlotte has a certain gross geniality, moreover she is human, she sets her heart on a man—though, when she is thwarted, ruthless is her revenge. Over against her is placed the figure of her pretty, silly, flirtatious little niece from suburbanized Dublin, a creature whose charm is conveyed as well as her silliness. The man who links their destinies, Roddy Lambert the vet, is, like them, half in, half out, of the gentry's world; but like them he belongs to Protestant Ireland.

About this small central group are indicated the peasant world below, and the world of the Big Houses above—with the further element of a few English officers from the garrison town. It is not only pre-truce Ireland, not only pre-war Ireland, it is Ireland of the prosperous times before the Boer War. Yet there is not a touch in it whose truth to reality does not remain evident to Irish readers to-day.

People did not care for grimness in those prosperous times; this was a grim story, in spite of the humour,

and within a year, the success of another book eclipsed it for the general public. In *Some Experiences of an Irish R M* the ladies showed how much they had learnt from a study of Kipling's short stories, they applied this technique to a hunting centre in the West of Ireland and in this book and its successors the Lever tradition reached its climax of accomplishment. There was the same gift for swift narration, the same rattle of easy humour, the same delight in a quaint phrase, but whereas Lever's notion of style was to accumulate phrase after phrase embellishing a droll situation, these authors pruned their work as if it were dialogue for the stage, not a word was wasted, and in their passages of peasant talk, the minutest inflections of idiom were studied and reproduced with delighted and delightful fidelity.

No candid person knowing Ireland who read these books could fail to recognize the intimacy and thoroughness of knowledge with which Irish life had been portrayed. It was in part the knowledge acquired in sport (one of the two cousins was actually a "master of hounds"), but it was also a knowledge informed by old intimacy and an affection in their very blood. They stood infinitely closer in sympathy to the people whose humours they portrayed than ever Lever or Maria Edgeworth had done, and if they laughed, there was no unkindness in their laughter.

Yet they laughed, they used Ireland to amuse the reading public, which was largely English—though never at any time were they as much valued in England as in Ireland. But the Irishman had so long been a figure of fun on the stage and off it that the literary movement disregarded their work, and owed nothing to it, nor, in a sense they to it. Yet as the series of their books progressed, a disposition to take the facts of Irish life more seriously became evident, and in one novel *Dan Russel the Fox*, there is study of a girl's attempt to let her whole heart follow

her admiration for noble horsemanship in a generous rider not of her own breed. Later, the advance went much farther, but this book was the end of collaboration. Violet Martin died untimely, and though her influence was always felt, the quality of the work had altered before there was evident in it a desire to be completely identified with what had become to be called Irish Ireland. Yet recognition was accorded to the earlier work, even more than to the later, when Dr. Edith Somerville received her honorary degree from Trinity College, and again when she was named among the original members of the Irish Academy of Letters. These honours were rather for *The Real Charlotte* and *The Experiences of an Irish R.M.* than for *Mount Music* and other notable novels written when Dr. Somerville held the pen alone.

In the same school must be placed the best known novels of "George A. Birmingham"—though not in the same class. Canon Hannay, to give him his real name, was perhaps more completely himself when he wrote of the Desert Fathers than when he turned his hand to fiction. But in his earliest books—*The Seething Pot*, and *Benedict Cavanagh*—he was seriously studying the same phenomena of Irish life that interested George Moore, though he saw them from a very different angle: and he was read with great attention, and much curiosity, for the writer's identity was not at first known. When it was discovered, there was much resentment among Catholics of the very free criticism bestowed on the Catholic clergy; on the other hand, Gaelic enthusiasts took sides with Canon Hannay, who almost alone among Protestant divines had learnt Irish and joined the Gaelic League and even become a member of its governing body. But controversy ceased when the novelist struck out a new line and in *Spanish Gold* produced a story which rivalled the *Irish R.M.* in its light-hearted humour: the central figure being a Protestant curate in

one of the Western parishes where parishioners are few and the opportunities for sporting adventure many

George Birmingham's work, though written with a clean crisp touch and abundant humour, lacks the concentration of serious art, but it is, especially in its beginnings, a significant product of the general movement which sought to quicken Ireland out of the stagnation left by Parnell's death. The revival of Gaelic, the attempt to create a national drama and a national literature, were closely linked with Sir Horace Plunkett's advocacy of co operation and with allied schemes for promoting local industries. This side of the movement was studied in novels which are in a sense the counterpart to George Birmingham's early work, for they also are the work of a clergyman—but a Catholic priest, Canon Sheehan. In *My New Curate* and in *Luke Delmege* the writer gives us a criticism of Irish life which is outspoken enough—the central figure of each book being a young priest in revolt against the ineffectual melancholy of Irish life, and its languor as compared with the superb energy not only of Protestant England but of Protestant Ulster. Canon Sheehan is less witty than Canon Hannay, but his work has a beauty and tenderness not matched in the other, and after setting out with great power the economic superiority of Protestant culture, he makes his young priest, back from the English mission, bow in submission to a new set of values. Luke Delmege found that he "was preaching the thrift of money to the misers of grace." Sympathy penetrates deeper than the keenest intelligence, and Canon Sheehan knew Ireland better not only than George Moore but than the Protestant observer. Yet his acquiescent conservatism placed him outside the movement on which he commented, and though a fact of the time, his novels can hardly be reckoned as a force. The vital energies lay elsewhere.

In 1899 Yeats had published his *Wind among the Reeds*

apart from the theatre, only another forty pages in all of verse came from him during the next five years. But there is very little in those forty pages that does not rank with his best. Any poem from *In the Seven Woods* will show how he had simplified his poetic diction by clearing it of inversions, how he had supplanted and varied the hard structure of English rhythms till they acquired almost the shifting cadences of actual speech. Work so carried out, in obedience to the demands of a delicately sensitive ear, was the true antidote to the tradition of verse set to political drum-beats which had been so persistent since Irish became English-speaking.

Also, almost any poem in this group shows the same central preoccupation, one after another makes a new link in the sequence of a lifelong story.

" No,

I have not a crumb of comfort, not a grain,—  
Time can but make her beauty over again  
Because of that great nobleness of hers,  
The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs,  
Burns but more clearly. O, she had not these ways  
When all the wild summer was in her gaze  
O heart ! O heart ! if she'd but turn her head,  
You'd know the folly of being comforted "

Such work would enrich any literature yet Yeats in this period threw the main force of his effort into the theatre. *On Baile's Strand*, produced when the Abbey opened its doors, was followed by *Kincora*. Neither of these plays had any marked popular success yet the work of Yeats as a whole was having its effect in the choice soil suited to it. Dublin of these years is recalled to us, in part by George Moore, but far more intimately by James Joyce, in his *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, which describes the student life. We can learn there that lines from Yeats

haunted the young men—not recalled as ringing phrases that prompted action, but simply as melodies filling the mind with high and delicate beauty

Joyce shows (if indeed such demonstration were necessary) that the student world was full of disputation and discussion concerning literature, philosophy, and the world at large. Echoes of this are preserved in the first book by a man whose name has affectionate mention often in George Moore, and figures also in *Ulysses*. *Pebbles from a Brook*, by John Eglinton, was published in 1901—published at Kilkenny by Standish O'Grady, in that "Library of the Nore" which was among O'Grady's high projects. There this detached essayist is found discussing with cool ironic phrase such subjects as Heroic Literature—that search for inspiration in the *Táin Bo Cuailgne* and in the *Bhagavad Gita* which was recommended by Yeats and A. E.

Marking the same period, there is, in poetry, Seumas O'Sullivan's first volume of verse, *Mud and Purple*, published about this time—and published in Dublin. For that matter there is to be noted the first appearance of a publishing firm in Dublin, independent of any bookselling business. The active director of Maunsel and Company was George Roberts, a member of Fay's original company and a contributor to the volume of poems collected by A. E., with him was J. M. Hone, now an associate member of the Irish Academy of Letters. We began about this time to hear also of brilliant young men, emerging from the student stage—T. M. Kettle and Oliver Gogarty, both of whom brought into the play of discussion extraordinary gifts of witty speech. Meanwhile minds were stimulated in a different direction by the advent of Hugh Lane, who insisted on endowing the corporation of Dublin with a gallery of modern art. Since he was the nephew of Lady Gregory and the friend of Yeats, and since his purposes were denounced as suspect by the kind of Catholicism which

had denounced the *Countess Cathleen*, his personality also became associated with the group of the Abbey Theatre—more and more the heart of the movement.

For, whereas the poets, essayists, and novelists worked in isolation, the theatre involved co-operation of many artists—distinguished Irish musicians were drawn in, there was the group of actors, several of them writers as well, and there was the considerable element in their habitual audience which thought itself capable of producing the constantly needed new plays. Within the first five-and-twenty years of its existence the Irish Theatre produced plays by nearly a hundred authors, of whom eighty-two were Irish and either living or recently dead. When the Abbey opened, Yeats, Synge, and Lady Gregory were recognized as forming the permanent staff of playwrights: but already they had gained a notable ally. Padraic Colum's first play, *Broken Soul*, was produced by the company in the Molesworth Hall. It was greeted as being more normally and typically Irish than anything yet offered by the theatre. Gogarty wrote in *The United Irishman*: "The play is built on the catastrophe produced from circumstances arising out of the temperament, religion, and tradition peculiar to the Irish people", it was, in short, the work of a representative Irish Catholic, depicting the life in which he had been brought up—and it pleased the more because it was without the fantastic distortion which Synge's vision always imposed on his view of Irish themes. In 1905 Colum followed it with *The Land*, a powerful drama which showed how, when after a generation of the fathers had fought through the land war to fix their grip on the soil and possession at last was secured for ever, the strong son and the strong daughter saw nothing to hold them back from America; so the land was left to the fools of the two families.

Colum had a real gift for play-writing, but he had not

the gift for making an audience laugh and in the first year of its existence the Abbey found a man who could do this. William Boyle was in the English civil service, and had been a constant theatre-goer, he had studied all the technique of the stage, and his *Building Fund* gave a comic presentation of Irish peasant life which was recognized as true to type and most diverting. Early in the next year, 1906, came his *Eloquent Dempsey*—a study of the local publican-politician, a type evolved by long periods of "agitation"—and all the world laughed heartily, not least of all the Irish members of parliament. Lady Gregory had added to the theatre's repertory two successful one-act farces, *Spreading the News* and *Hyacinth Halvey*, her one poetic tragedy, *The Gaol Gate*, had a beauty more accessible than that of any play by Yeats, except the *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, and the Abbey now began to play to full houses.

Yet there were troubles. It was found necessary to organize the enterprise on a new basis, as a limited liability company with Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Synge as directors. This appeared to several of the actors a transformation of their amateur voluntary work into a commercial undertaking, with professional artists, and there was a grievous secession. Máire ni Shuiblaigh, Honor Lavelle, and Miss Garvey went—the three best known among the actresses, they were followed by Seumas O'Sullivan and George Roberts. The chief loss seemed irreplaceable, for Máire ni Shuiblaigh joined a singularly distinguished beauty to a voice admirably adapted by nature to the speaking of verse. Nothing ever replaced her beauty, but within a year Sara Allgood and her sister Máire O'Neill made the company stronger in its actresses than it ever had been, or has been since they left. Yet nothing in the story of this movement is so surprising as Ireland's power to furnish fresh talent—and even genius—to the company of actors.



The other difficulty was Synge His *Well of the Saints*, produced early in 1905, was again taken as an attack on the Irish people and on their religion. A blind beggar and his blind wife have told each other dreams of their beauty till the desire of their hearts is for realization by sight they go to a holy well, a saint blesses them, their eyes are opened, and all they can do is to pray to be made blind again. But when blindness returns, the dream is gone for ever. Synge worked out this ironic symbol with all his power, the speech is superbly coloured; but Catholic Ireland expected that a miracle should tend to edification, and resented this pagan irony.

Synge worked slowly, and two years had passed before his next piece was ready—*The Playboy of the Western World*.

As I understand it, Synge had been thinking of Ireland's attitude to the law. For civil cases, the decision of the law courts was readily sought, and accepted. In matters of crime nobody desired to protect a thief, and if rape was committed—a rare case—the whole countryside would hunt the man like dogs. But crimes of vengeance were in a different category. To kill a landlord or an agent of the landlord in the land war was an act of war, and the whole population protected the killer. Any informer was a traitor, and might be killed, under the rules of what was virtually a secret society. It was not a long step to regarding the killer who must be protected against English law as a champion of the Irish, and a champion easily becomes a hero. Synge, with the logic of irresponsible irony, pushed from this to a conception that, in an ultra-Irish community, the greater the crime, the greater would be the hero-worship, and his playboy is a young man in flight from the police because he believes that he has killed his father. All the development is ironical. the boy, finding himself treated with superstitious respect, grows out of timidity into arrogance; he

acts the playboy with spirit, and makes romantic love to the daughter of the house that sheltered him. But when his old father arrives, with his head bandaged after the spade stroke, but in full chase after the runaway, the playboy is treated as a detected fraud, and the girl joins the attack on him.

If this was to be taken as a portrayal of native Irish character, it was not flattering, and Synge was already suspected of a malignant desire to caricature the race. A storm was brewing from the first, yet it only broke when one of the characters used the word "shift"—outraging, we were told, all the Irish traditions of modest speech. To the end of the play, words were drowned by noisy demonstration, and by clamours to have the play withdrawn. Yeats refused, and for the whole week *The Playboy* was acted virtually in dumb show while riot went on in front. But on every occasion Synge's *Riders to the Sea*, played first, was listened to and applauded.

Yeats was urged vehemently by leading personages to throw over Synge. "We like your work," they said, "we like Lady Gregory's and Colum's and Boyle's—the theatre, after long lean years, begins to prosper, why insist on forcing upon Dublin what Dublin detests? We enjoy the satire of *The Eloquent Dempsey* because it is like life. Synge is condemned because he is not like the Ireland we know." That was the gist of the argument, but Yeats never budged. Synge was giving to Ireland the best plays it had ever seen, work of real art, and the theatre would not yield to the mob. Yeats got little support from his fellow-workers, Boyle and Colum seceded, in sympathy with the protest, but he held out, though for months afterwards the Abbey Theatre was almost empty. Yet within a couple of years, after *The Playboy* had been acclaimed in London and in the United States, it was produced again in Dublin without trouble. No one has

rendered more courageous service to art than Yeats by this championship of another man's work.

Unhappily, the fight was made for a failing power, and when *Deirdre of the Sorrows* was produced in January 1910, it lacked the final touches; Synge had died before it was completed to his satisfaction. His death may perhaps be said to mark the close of a first stage in the dramatic movement. Yet perhaps that should be fixed rather at the beginning of 1908 when, on a question as to the authority of the manager and producer, W. G. Fay and his brother left the company which had been their creation.

New talent was, however, forthcoming. In Fred O'Donovan the directors found another actor of the first rank, and in the years between the production of *The Playboy* and that of *Deirdre*, plays had been produced by nine Irish writers new to the Abbey. These included Miss W. M. Letts, better known as a writer of verse; Conal O'Riordan, better known as the author of *Adam of Dublin* and other novels; Thomas MacDonagh, a young poet, later to be executed along with Pearse for his share in the 1916 rising. These were writers whose careers were not to be made in the drama. On the other hand, W. F. Casey, whose two plays *The Man Who Missed the Tide* and *The Suburban Groove* made a mark at once, wrote no more for the Abbey.

In 1909 there was produced a play by Shaw—*The Showing up of Blanco Posnet*—which the English censorship had refused to license. *John Bull's Other Island* would have been given to the Abbey but for the fact that they had no actor capable of representing the central figure, Broadbent, that typical Englishman moving among contrasted Irish types.

The play was, however, seen in Dublin, at the Gaiety Theatre, presented by an English company, and was highly successful, though the applause came in alternating bursts,

according as the Irish Nationalist or Irish Unionist section of the house felt that a shaft had gone home on the other side. It is Shaw's one direct contribution to the Irish literary movement. In his other plays he is content to be the gadfly to all respectable convictions, an Irish gadfly, exempt from British prepossessions but nevertheless using his sting for the good of the British commonwealth as he conceives it. In *John Bull* the satire is directed not only against England's attitude to Ireland but against Ireland's attitude to England, and still more against Ireland's attitude to Irish problems.

Two other factors in the movement have to be noted. One was the increasing output of translation from the Irish texts, and in this a German, Kuno Meyer, had no equal. His command of words for the purpose would have been remarkable in any English writer, and he brought to the knowledge of Ireland much forgotten beauty. In another part of the same field, Lady Gregory, that ceaseless and most versatile worker, took in hand to reissue the old saga cycles in a new dress. In her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* and her *Gods and Fighting Men*, she told the Red Branch stories and the Ossianic or Fenian stories in what had come to be called "Kiltartan" from the name of the village near her home in East Galway, where she studied peasant speech strongly coloured by Gaelic idiom. It is no less artificial than Synge's language in his peasant plays, but it fitted her purpose and these books did perhaps more than any others to diffuse a general knowledge of Ireland's epic literature.

At the same time Professor Eóin MacNeill had begun that work of reconstructing our conceptions of the early Irish states by an intensive study of the old genealogies, law tracts, and such matter, which appeared a dead jungle till he brought life into it. No other scholar has limited his study so strictly to the original texts, and the divining power which he brought to the task has given intelligible

reality to what was least comprehensible. Meanwhile Mrs J R. Green was applying a mind, specially trained for historic investigation, to the mediæval Ireland when the Earls of Desmond—Normans turned Irish—and the Kings of Thomond, successors to Brian of the Tribute, made treaties of alliance with great continental powers. Her object was to revive the pride of Ireland by demonstrating that even for centuries after the Norman conquest Ireland had a rich culture of its own. It is probable that her zeal often drew larger deductions than the evidence which she cited would warrant, but, writing as she did in a style that had both lucidity and distinction, she stimulated interest throughout Ireland, and fully earned her place among leaders of the Irish literary revival by filling with living shapes a period left blank in the imagination of a country which for generations had never studied its own history.

## CHAPTER XI

### JAMES STEPHENS, JOYCE, AND THE ULSTER WRITERS

FROM 1910 to the outbreak of world war Ireland was intensely concerned with the political struggle over Home Rule. This included the formation of the Ulster Volunteers and the answering movement throughout the rest of Ireland. Some of the most brilliant young men, notably T. M. Kettle, were engrossed in the parliamentary contest. On the other hand, growing excitement gave an impetus to the extremist party of physical force, and young poets were active in its organization. Thomas MacDonagh was one of them, Joseph Plunkett another, but the most important was Patrick Pearse—like Davis and like Arthur Griffith, son of an Englishman, but born of an Irish mother and brought up in Ireland. He had gone first actively into the Gaelic League, and for several years edited its journal. Then he set up a school, St. Enda's, at which all the teaching should be done in Irish. Verse he wrote, both in Irish and in English, and always notably; but it was only the occasional expression of his feeling. His bent was towards action, and his first means of action lay through teaching. MacDonagh joined the staff of his school.

The older men, Yeats and A. E., stood aloof from politics; *neither of them liked the official Irish party*. A. E., a devoted admirer of Horace Plunkett, was in these years editing a weekly paper—*The Irish Statesman*, which Plunkett owned

—and was aided by J. W. Good, a first-rate journalist and critic. Its offices were a rallying-point in Dublin. Yeats, as his published work shows, was at this time much out of love with the course of affairs in his country. "Romantic Ireland's dead and gone," he wrote in 1913, "it's with O'Leary in the grave;" and he lamented over his efforts left unfriended "and the best workman gone."

Yet though Synge was dead, in the year of his death Ireland saw emerge a genius less crabbed than his—happier, luckier, destined to larger fulfilment. For James Stephens, whose *Insurrections* appeared in 1909, is now the author of ten or a dozen volumes: for the most part, it is true, containing very little print, but all just as much alive as when they first appeared. The first book, *Insurrections*, was poetry—and the dedication to A E is one more mark of this all-pervading personal influence. Nothing in that was obviously marked as Irish, though an Irish voice was speaking all through; but the next volume, *Mary Make-believe*, or *The Charwoman's Daughter*, showed a two-handed talent; it was a prose story of the Dublin tenements. Abel Chevalley in his book on *Le Roman Anglais* says, with truth, that he cannot be accused of lavishing big words, but that here he is bound to hail a little masterpiece. The book has a sweetness of temper for which the only parallel I know is in Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*. But neither in prose nor in verse did James Stephens show any sign of discipleship; and the prose, perfectly finished yet as friendly as the friendliest speech, was even more individual than the verse. Still it was a story, even a novel, more or less conforming to type. Next came *The Crock of Gold*, in which the author, departing from the ordinary rut of life, mixed up tinkers and leprechauns. He moved in the fairy world with the same intimate familiarity as in the streets of Dublin, and after this his fiction never condescended again to modern human society. Gods, demigods, or faeries had

always to be concerned in it, if humans figured, they were always tramps. Sometimes he took again the old legends and retold them, in his own prose, not, like Synge or Lady Gregory, in an artificial speech but in such English as would be natural for an Irishman to use when telling a story—now and then, it is true, deliberately giving it a quaintness by introduction of Irish phrase, as when a king calls a young warrior “my pulse.” *Acushla* is a form of address often used by Irish countryfolk, but the use of its translated form is deliberate artifice. But these tricks are superficial, essentially, James Stephens can become at will one of the old story-makers, and can invent detail of his own with the same sort of picturesque exaggeration that was their delight. Yeats and all the others accept the broad lines of the sagas, to weave upon them embroidery of their own. Stephens appears to be making up parts of the saga as he goes along—just as in his book of verse, *Reincarnations*, he takes a poem by some of the later Gaelic writers (from the sixteenth century down to the famine time) and out of a verse or a phrase spins his own equivalent for the poem. Some of these, especially the bawling protests of O’Bruadair against a niggardly world, are neither translations nor imitations, but what the title calls them—reincarnations. So, in his *Land of Youth*, a knitting together of tales preliminary to Maeve’s great cattle raid on Ulster, he has to tell of a battle between the pigs of Connacht and the pigs of Munster, in which the visiting pigs, from Connacht were put under a spell so that food would not nourish them. “Their hunger was such that they screamed from the rage of it, and the air whistled through their long lean snouts like the whistle of a wintry gale through a hole.” That is only one sentence from a page of description, contrasting with the fatness of the Munster pigs whose “stomachs rested on the ground so that they had to sleep standing up.” But it is exactly like what a



bard of mediæval Ireland would have put into one of the traditional recitals, if he did not find it there.

In short, Stephens is not a pioneer but a profiteer of the Irish literary revival. Yeats and Russell had used the Irish saga stuff as an experiment; Stephens, twenty years later, finds the material, so to say, set out for him. What would have come from this most original writer if the Gaelic movement had not existed, it is hard to guess; but neither his first volume of verse nor his first prose story is coloured by it. We might have more books like *The Charwoman's Daughter*. But Goldsmith wrote only one *Vicar*. At all events, after his first two volumes, all the work of James Stephens is not only Irish but full of Gaelic lore and Gaelic fantasy. This is less true of his poems than of his prose. But the poems are full of that detailed delight in natural scenery which is more marked in poems of the Ossianic cycle than perhaps in any other European literature before the Renaissance.

Stephens is known best, whether inside Ireland or outside it, by his *Crock of Gold*. Nobody can resist the gaiety and even the hilarity of his fantastic inventions. Humour bubbles out of him at every pore, and it is always good humour. There is more fun in his prose than in that of all his contemporaries put together; and it is not lacking in his verse. In this the Gaelic influence is not obtruded; a reader accustomed to the best poetry of the nineteenth century would find nothing to estrange him, except it may be some odd little quirks of familiar phrase. Yet the verse is by the old standards harmonious, though often novel in pattern; the sense is easily followed, and though at times this poet brings into his cursings words such as Villon affected, he always respects the language which is his medium. Verse is more durable than prose, and it may happen that the mind of James Stephens will be known to later generations by his poetry. Yet perhaps the fullest

expression of it is in his fiction, as distinctive as Sterne's but without the least touch of Sterne's affected singularity. Wherever you take this author, whether in prose or verse, he is himself, to be judged by the whole, not in relation to some exceptional felicity.

Of this momentary inspiration there is a notable instance in the work of his contemporary, Seumas O'Kelly, who wrote several volumes of fiction in addition to four plays produced at the Abbey between 1910 and 1919. In one of the novels *Wet Clay*, the scene is laid in East Galway (the O'Kelly country, just as Clare adjoining is O'Brien country), and this book contains the description of a mowing match, fit to rank beside Tolstoi's famous passage. But nothing else in the book has outstanding merit. Yet one story of his can never be wholly forgotten. "The Weaver's Grave" is of a length which Conrad often used (making perhaps fifty pages of this book), it turns upon the fact that in Ireland certain families retain the right of burial in old churchyards, otherwise closed as being overcrowded. The weaver, a very old man, has died, and the young woman who was his third wife has to see that he is buried where he has a right to lie. But no one knows the spot precisely, and two of his contemporaries—one formerly a nailer, one a stonebreaker—are brought from the poor-house to point it out. They cannot agree, and in their dispute they revive memories of fifty years over the graves. Before the dispute is settled and the right grave opened, the widow has made a tryst with the younger of the two grave-diggers. There are things in the telling that recall Hardy, the dialogue perhaps owes something to Synge—not so much by imitation, as that it works a mine which Synge opened. But it lies closer to the reality of life than Synge's oddly distorted pictures—as close as anything of Hardy's, and its grim humour is shot through with flashes of beauty. Unhappily O'Kelly died young, leaving

only this one masterpiece—more notable than anything up to then contributed to the movement by a writer from the Catholic Irish people. To them, Moore cannot properly be said to belong. Boyle belonged to them, and of the younger generation, Colum and Seumas O'Sullivan. But Yeats, Russell, Lady Gregory, Synge, and Stephens were all of another inheritance.

Gogarty—who already counted, not by his early verse but by his talk—was a Catholic, but had been through Trinity, and so stood a little outside the seething and fermenting life of Catholic students vividly suggested in Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. University College, Dublin, did not become till 1910 officially the centre of a National University with allied colleges in Cork and Galway; but the name has not greatly changed the facts, except that with the establishment of the National University there came a much fuller professorial equipment, and especially an amply provided school of Gaelic study, to which Hyde and Eóin MacNeill were attached. Yet before this, as after it, there were two hives of student life in Dublin, and the hives did not mingle.

In a sense Kettle was the outstanding figure of Catholic youth, a brilliant mathematician and student of philosophy, yet one to whom Aquinas meant no less than Kant or Hegel; a writer eloquent and forcible both in prose and verse; an orator whose eloquence could handle freely his very wide ranging knowledge, and whose wit crystallized into swift epigrams. But Kettle threw the energy of his mind into politics and sought to renovate the orthodox traditional nationalism. Parnell's party had been, from 1880 to 1890, a party of young men with a leader little older than themselves. From 1900 onwards all the Irish political leaders of it, and many of the rank and file, had been in public life for a generation. The only new force in it, Joseph Devlin, a man of Kettle's age, was a born leader of

men, but essentially an organizer, concerned for the continuity of the movement, and to that extent distrustful of new ideas. The parliamentary party found Kettle an uneasy bedfellow. Yet a great body of the young men followed him in general support of a movement which from 1910 onwards gave promise of success.

But the other ideal, which distrusted the whole idea of "constitutional agitation" and carried on the Fenian tradition of seeking freedom by physical force, made stronger appeal to most of the young poets. Griffiths' paper, *The United Irishman*, preaching continually that Ireland should be done with Westminster and limit its effort to resistance organized within the four seas of Ireland, gave a rallying point. Undoubtedly, too, the teaching of the Gaelic League gave a new meaning of the aims of complete independence. Ireland was to seek freedom, not only from English rule but from England's imposed culture; it was to be free to develop its neglected Gaelic inheritance. All the younger men inclined this way—Pearse, MacDonagh, Plunkett, and Seumas MacManus, a writer of Irish stories and verse, some of whose short plays the Abbey had produced, and it was evident also that the sympathies of Yeats, Russell, and Hyde leant to that side. They accepted Lionel Johnson's verse

"Ere peace comes to Inisfail,  
Some swords at least some fields must reap,  
Some burning glory fire the Gael"

Poets do not love compromises, and the most to be hoped from Westminster was a half-measure of freedom. But this was not the only freedom in question. In the decade which followed Parnell's death, Catholic Ireland was torn by a savage internecine feud. Passionate loyalties were at war. The Church had taken sides in an internal

political dispute, priests and bishops had not merely used, but in some cases abused, their authority. Parnellites blamed the Church for the defeat and even the death of their leader. His heart was broken, they said.—An ineffaceable picture of that time has been fixed by the genius of a Catholic whose memories of childhood went back to the time when a mail-boat entering Kingstown harbour brought irrefutable tidings that Parnell was dead.

For the father of James Joyce was a Parnellite organizer, but the aunt whom he called "Dante"—a nationalist so fierce that she had twice struck a man in Kingstown because he lifted his hat for "God save the King"—was now fiercely anti-Parnellite. Joyce—a brilliant pupil of the Jesuits, first at Clongowes, their great school in Kildare, and later (as a day boy) at Belvedere in Dublin—grew up along with the Gaelic League and the literary revival. He left Dublin in 1904 to be a wandering student on the Continent. In 1907 his first book, poems called *Chamber Music*, was published in London, delicate, sensitive, accomplished work; but not till 1914 did he produce prose fiction. Then his volume of short stories, *Dubliners*, showed with what an extraordinary exactness of detail his memory and imagination could construct scenes from the life in which he grew up.

That life was seen with detachment, without cruelty; yet page by page there is conveyed a distressing sense of futility; as if study was concentrated on some backwater, having just so much current as should keep unwanted objects jostling each other as they bobbed up and down. One study of municipal politics showed a satiric intention; but the young Joyce feels it sufficient—in describing Ivy Day, the commemoration of Parnell's death, in a Dublin Committee room—to present persons, actions, and words exactly as they were. Reality is more sardonic than caricature. Conversation is reproduced without the least attempt to impose a literary quality on the sentences; and

in narrative, when narrative is necessary, the writing is deliberately reduced to a colourless medium. Only in the closing story "The Dead," we find another quality. The annual dance given by three old music teachers is described with the same meticulous fidelity, but when the good-natured Gabriel takes his wife back to the hotel where he and she are to stay, it seems to him that her eyes that evening have had a new light in them, and unfamiliar surroundings add a touch of adventure to his desire. But when he tries to draw her to him, a burst of weeping comes, and he learns for the first time how a boy had loved her and lost his life for her—a boy whose memory was recalled by the last song which they had heard. He knew then that her life had held what he had never given her—a touch of romance. She slept and in the end he slept too, lulled by the thought of snow falling.

"It was falling on every part of the dark central plain, on the treeless hills, falling softly upon the Bog of Allen, and further westward, softly falling into the dark mutinous Shannon waves. It was falling too, upon every part of the lonely churchyard upon the hill where Michael Furey lay buried. It lay thickly drifted on the crooked crosses and headstones, on the spears of the little gate, on the barren thorns. His soul swooned slowly as he heard the snow falling faintly through the universe and faintly falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead."

Whatever competent critic read this, must have known that here was a writer—but this book was not in its substance challenging. Two years later challenge came with Joyce's account of his own youth, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. But in 1916 Ireland's thoughts were elsewhere. Joyce's story stopped at 1904. 1916 saw a very

different Dublin, and after that every year deepened the difference. When rebellion broke out in Easter week, it was unpopular; at least twenty thousand wives or mothers in Dublin had men serving in France or in Gallipoli. But England, as Pearse foresaw, turned rebels into martyrs, and not only the commonalty but the major poets, Yeats and A E, gave fierce utterance to their resentment and their admiration. All that Pearse, MacDonagh, and Plunkett had written was reprinted, and read as it would never have been read but for their deaths, and being read, not only in Ireland but out of Ireland, it inflamed sympathy for them and the cause of Ireland's political freedom. And yet the same year that saw these poets faced with a firing party cost Ireland other lives of brilliant promise by quite other death. Kettle was killed on the Somme taking a company of the Dublins into action; elsewhere in the same struggle fell Francis Ledwidge, a young peasant from Meath, whose published poetry recalled rather that of the Englishman, Clare, than that of any Irish writer. Such men had at the time a vast volume of sympathy behind them, and the mood of Ireland was bitter and perplexed.

It was only when this turmoil of feeling began to die away that some readers at least saw the importance of Joyce's autobiographic study; and, in truth, the hurly-burly of political events which lasted in Ireland from 1916 to 1923 prevented it from ever arousing there the partisanship, for or against, which at another time would have been created. Later, the blazing notoriety of *Ulysses* turned attention to it; and most people who desire to comprehend the better-known book will be well-advised to study the *Portrait*—which is at all events, beyond yea or nay, intelligible, and a work of extraordinary power.

If it be a study of a diseased soul in a diseased country—that is how Joyce saw himself and saw Ireland. Indeed he saw his own disease as a result of the abnormal conditions

Then comes school, and then, at home, vague transition from comfort to a much poorer habitation in the squalid north side of Dublin : Mr. Dedalus was in money trouble Stephen Dedalus now becomes a day boy : persevering, prize-winning, but lacking "the vigour of rude male health" ; lacking the love of games and the comradeship it brings, and already prematurely obsessed by sex. Secretly he stumbles into the street of brothels, secretly indulges what he is daily taught to be mortal sin ; and then religion reaches him. We read the sermons that are preached to him, we follow his tormented soul through its terrors, back to the confessional, to absolution, and reconciliation—when he is sixteen. Then, after a period of conspicuous devotion, he is approached by the director of the college, who puts before him the possibility of a call to the religious life. "The proud claims of the church and the mystery and power of priestly office" were presented, to a mind which fully perceived the dignity and the order of a Jesuit's life. But, returning from that interview to the slatternly squalor of his father's house, his choice was already made. He had refused. Then came the university. Already he knew himself to be in love with words. "Was it their colour ? No, it was not their colour ; it was the poise and balance of the period itself", and the artist discusses in a reverie the lure for him of his own special medium. Yet, when he talks at the college with the dean of studies, an English convert, a new aspect of this sensibility presents itself :

"The language which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words, *home*, *Christ*, *de*, *master*, on his lips and on mine. His language, so familiar and so foreign, is always for me an acquired speech. I have not made nor accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language."



Thus poignant cry of the disinherited runs all through Joyce's writing. Nothing is left to the Irish Catholic, his country is the stranger's, even his language is what the stranger's occupation has imposed. Learning, as his generation had begun to learn, as the generation before them had not learnt, something more than a dim outline of Ireland's history, he derives from the new movement nothing more than an added sense of defeat. What had he, as an Irishman? No inheritance but a spirit of revolt and the religion which had been maintained in defiance of the stranger. But the revolt—so it looked in that period of squalid collapse—had produced nothing but a futile gesturing attitude, his own father's lifelong gesturing had effected nothing except to bring on his household the servitude of a squalid poverty. And the religion into which he was born was in itself a bondage. It held him too tight. Through his education it had been wrought into the very marrow of his bones, and because of his intense intellectual activity, he must be at every instant aware of it, because of his passionately artistic nature he could admit of no compromises. Either complete submission or complete revolt: the Jesuits' pupil accepted the inexorable logic of Jesuit teaching.

Again, for the Irish born Catholic, his religion was traditionally a sign of his nationality, and he was born into nationalist belief. The Irish Catholic was held from breaking away by a special loyalty that did not affect the Catholic in England, in France, or in Italy. The result was a singular narrowness. Where but in Ireland could students have been found to head the revolt against a work of art because it did not fit with their notions of Catholic orthodoxy? He had seen this happen with his fellow-students when Yeats's *Countess Cathleen* was produced.

All these ties gripping and coercing him were drawn sharper by the hardest of all—the mother-tie. She was

nearest to his affection, yet she had opposed his going to the university because she feared for his faith. From the outset of his liberation from restraint she had sought to close one avenue of escape—This is not stressed in *The Portrait of an Artist*, but it is stated.

All the scenes of student life show the young man's beating against restraint :

"Try to be one of us," says Davin (the frank, honest athlete) "In heart you are an Irishman, but your pride is too powerful"

"My ancestors threw off their language and took another," Stephen said "They allowed a handful of foreigners to subject them Do you fancy I am going to pay in my own life and person debts they made"

When the soul of a man is born in this country, there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of language, nationality, religion I shall try to fly by those nets."

But the pith of the matter is reached in another conversation with a friend more on Stephen's intellectual level, who pleads that Stephen should continue to communicate even if he disbelieves, because it will set his mother's mind at rest. If not, does he really disbelieve? Is his abstention not due to a fear—

which are massed twenty centuries of authority and veneration ”

The only way is flight to where these ties bind less urgently

“ I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church , and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can ”

The outcome of the resolve so published was seen six years later in the seven hundred pages of *Ulysses*—a book which must be considered apart from the literature produced after the war for in it, as in the others Joyce is dealing with his dual subject—his own soul, and the Dublin of his student period which ended in 1904

The book is much easier to condemn than to read, and infinitely more difficult to understand But the opening section at least gives a key

Stephen Dedalus has come home from his voluntary exile, recalled to his mother's deathbed , days have gone by, death has come, and he is now a voluntary outcast, in revolt against life In revolt against the prosperity and health of the active, healthy, well-fed, and blasphemously witty young medical with whom he has been staying in the old martello tower at Seapoint, facing Howth and the bay In revolt against an English presence “ A ponderous Saxon Bursting with money and indigestion Because he comes from Oxford ” So Buck Mulligan the doctor describes his other guest then he turns on Stephen

“ You could have knelt down damn it, when your dying mother asked you I'm hyperborean as much as you But to think of your mother begging you with

her last breath to kneel down and pray for her And you refused. There is something sinister in you "

So far as that had the resistance to false homage been carried And the passage which follows—translating, as is the endeavour throughout this work, thought into words, inserted among the actual words recorded as spoken—shows how the recusant is haunted by the scene of a refusal

So far as the book's meaning conveys itself to me, the young man with his soul in torment seeks to ease his torment by wallowing . and the rest of it tells how he wallowed, with whom, and in what city.

In order to depict a day or night in the life of Dublin, it does not suffice to follow the solitary figure in black ("he kills his mother, but he can't wear grey trousers," Buck Mulligan comments) A normal Dubliner must be the focal figure of a drab pageant, into which at intervals Stephen Dedalus will drift, distracting attention from the Odyssey of Mr Leopold Bloom. Bloom is of Hungarian descent, but with a name more recently modelled on the German-Jewish pattern, he differs from his associates in this town of pub-crawlers in that he is more industrious than they in pursuit of unlaborious means to get money, and less ready to disperse it at the nearest bar ; in that his enjoyment of music is more educated than theirs, and his preoccupation with feminine contours and perfumes more persistent, also, perhaps, in that his disposition is more philosophic—for the luscious, overripe singer whom he has married does not depend on him solely or principally for her comforts He differs far more sharply, in that, though a lapsed Jew, he is not to be counted a Catholic In truth, except for his need of money and the besetting carnal desire, he has not much in common with his fellows : no more than has the lone poet adrift on the town,

where the poet's father is a full national citizen—or, in terms of the press, a respected citizen

Since, however, these two motives sway powerfully the whole mass, Mr Bloom is not suitable for a central figure, and he has the unusual advantage of remaining sober by preference

Bloom's day begins with a funeral, attended in the company of the elder Mr Dedalus. On the drive out they have a glimpse of the poet walking alone but he does not reappear till later, when Mr Bloom, after a long interview with the representatives of Dublin's journalism (when he touts for commission on an advertisement), has made his way to the National Library, in order to consult files of a provincial newspaper. One of the most enthusiastic librarians that the world has known, T W Lyster, had made this building into a centre for the whole Catholic student population (Trinity having its own much less accessible library), and in *The Portrait of an Artist* several scenes pass in its portico. Stephen Dedalus is now in the librarian's room, he has come accompanied by Buck Mulligan, Lyster ("the Quaker librarian") flits in and out, anxiously attending on the needs of Mr Bloom and others, but R I Best, his second in command, and John Eglinton (both familiar in Moore's writings) are active in the discussion. A E is present at the beginning, but soon passes out—Eglinton in his *Irish Literary Portraits*, tells us that "Buck Mulligan's conversation, or rather his vehement and whimsical oratory, is reproduced with such exactness in *Ulysses* that one is driven to conclude that Joyce even then" (in student days) "was taking notes." He writes again: "In the interview of the much enduring Stephen with the officials of the National Library the present writer experiences a twinge of recollection of things actually said." This picture of an hour is, in short, like enough to the way in which Joyce passed many

days ; but for the purpose of *Ulysses*, we are shown him driving away besetting thought by the surface play of his brain. Thought put into words comes in between the ingenious improvisation - thought conjures up the image of his mother, rotting - thought again.

"Must I do this ?

"On——"

and the improvisation continues

Then the book goes into virtuosities of humour, showing, for instance, first how a prize fight is described at a Dublin bar, and then how the same account is worded in next day's Dublin paper. But the centre of the work is the *Walpurgis Nacht* in the street of brothels, where all the characters of the book pass and repass, fantastically transfigured ; and at the climax, Stephen is there in his black clothes, conducting the whirl of movement, evoking one figure after the other, till suddenly, unbidden, arises the phantom of his mother's corpse. There is grim dialogue, and the climax comes when the corpse prays :

"Sacred heart of Jesus have mercy on him, save him from hell."

"No, no, no. Break my spirit all of you, if you can. I'll bring you all to heel."

humorist, of all humorists he is the angriest—and to that extent, the least engaging in his humour.

Alone, of the outstanding names in this literature, Joyce never touched the drama. But there was no dearth of playwrights.

Of those writers who counted for most in the Abbey Theatre enterprise after the death of Synge, 1916, Lennox Robinson had appeared as early as 1908 with *The Clancy Name*. His *Cross Roads* in 1909 and *Harvest* in 1910 followed, but *Patriots*, in 1912, raised more interest than any of them by its political satire. T. C. Murray (now, like Lennox Robinson, a member of the Irish Academy) produced, in 1912, his first piece, *Maurice Harte*, a moving study of the relations between an ambitious countrywoman and the son she would force into the priesthood. All these were plays familiar in type on the Abbey stage, Lord Dunsany, from 1909 onward, contributed a different and more fantastic drama. But in 1911 Mr. St. John Ervine brought a more effective talent to the Abbey's service, and his play, *Mixed Marriage*, raised questions of the dividing line in Irish national life which had not been handled there before. In 1915 Ervine became manager of the Abbey Theatre, at a difficult time, which became impossible after the Easter rising. There was a great scattering of the company. Ervine went to serve in France, and did not return to Dublin, though one of his best plays, *John Ferguson*, was produced at the Abbey in 1917.

His association with the Abbey makes him a part of the general Irish literary movement, though his ideals and traditions were unlike those of most who took part in it. Nevertheless, no Irish nationalist wishes to separate Ulster from Ireland, and Ervine's work is an excellent expression of the Ulster mind. His powerful novel, *Mrs Martin's Men*, catches the quality of types only to be found in the north-eastern region.

Another Ulsterman, Shan Bullock belongs even more unmistakably to his province, yet is less aggressively distinctive. In a long series of novels, he studied various phases of the countryside in which he was brought up—the region whose centre is Enniskillen and which lies about the maze of land and lake-water that is called Upper Lough Erne. This Ulster is remote in every way from the industrial area centring in Belfast, its life is as purely agricultural as that of any region in the Free State, and what Shan Bullock describes is the existence of strong farmers of their sons, of the men who come back changed from the United States to their old homes. He has no passion for the land, and seems conscious more of the hardships than the pleasures in a farmer's life, he realizes the permanent estrangement between the two camps—for in Fermanagh Protestant and Catholic are equal in numbers—yet has no zeal of partisanship. His whole work is sombre in tone, a blackavised view of the life, and more specially of the climate, but the writing has a sinewy strength and a fine sincerity, and everywhere in it is conveyed the strong attachment of a man to his home and his people that he sprang from, and an admiration for their rough-hewn endurance. One story of schoolboy life, *The Cubs* deserves to be compared with the several studies of Catholic schooldays presented to us by Joyce by Conal O'Riordan (in *Adam of Dublin*), by Eimar O'Duffy in *The Wasted Island*, and others. But perhaps Shan Bullock's best work is in *The Loughsiders*, in which he skilfully enhances the quality of the people who had never stirred from their parish by settling down among them a much travelled man. None of his novels had wide popularity, but in the close of his life he received the recognition of being chosen by the most distinguished of his fellow-workers to a seat in the Irish Academy.

Another Ulster writer has not received this distinction, but has been read and laughed over through all Ireland as



"Lynn Doyle"—whose first book, *Ballygullion*, was among those published in Dublin by the Maunsel firm. This author has applied himself, as persistently as ever Lever did, or the creators of *The Irish R.M.*, to be amusing, but with a knowledge of Irish life far more intimate than Lever's, and covering a different field from that of the hunting ladies who lived in "the Big House." The manager of a bank's country branch is part of the local life, much as is the dispensary doctor, and "Lynn Doyle" has profited by all his occasions for humorous observation. Now and then, as in one story of a couple who sacrificed and starved to buy out their farm, and died as the purchase was completed, his knowledge reaches deeper. He always writes with a clean touch; but it is only in a charming account of his upbringing, *As Ulster Childhood*, and in a very unconventional guidebook, *The Spirit of Ireland*, that even hasty readers must recognize how much culture and charm lie behind that broad humour.

Like the rest, he has written plays, but they have not been seen at the Abbey. More than one have been produced by the company which sprang up in Belfast, to emulate what had been done by the Fays. But the leading playwright of the Ulster Theatre, and also its leading actor, was "Rutherford Mayne." The pseudonym disguises a name which his sister, Miss Helen Waddell, was to make illustrious.

This company never departed from its amateur status and had no permanent home, taking a theatre occasionally in Belfast, where its plays were first seen. But its popularity in the North cannot have exceeded that which attended all its performances in Dublin. There, no doubt, the most successful play of all was the extravaganza, *Thompson in Tirnanoge*, which showed a little Belfast Orangeman in his bowler hat turned loose among the heroes and heroines of Gaelic mythology—Finn MacCool, Grania, Cuchulain,

Deirdre and the rest. After conversation, he was welcomed as a fighting man, not unworthy of the Red Branch tradition. As in *John Bull's Other Island*, shafts of mockery went home in different directions, but there was nothing at which the whole house did not laugh most heartily. Ulster humour throughout these plays showed itself clear of the bitter twist which haunted all the comedies of Irish life produced at the Abbey (with exception of one or two of Lady Gregory's). It was the humour that came from a people better contented with itself and the world than the rest of Ireland was then, or has yet come to be.

*Thompson* was the work of one of the Morrow family, who took large part in the acting, the scene-painting and all the rest. As a work of art, nothing in the repertory equalled *The Drone*, in which Rutherford Mayne sketched an Irish farming household of hard-working jovial people, among whom lived, free from labour, one brother whose conviction of his own talents was so great that it imposed itself on his family. They worked while he studied the inventions by which he was to be one day famous and rich. There was in this, beside the good-humoured fun, a real philosophic humour, which would give it rank with, for instance, the best of Boyle's productions. Work of Rutherford Mayne's has been seen in later years at the Abbey, but none of it prevents the feeling that this author has never taken his own talent seriously enough to give it the full expression which cannot be achieved without hard labour.

It should be remarked that the Ulster players illustrated the truth that Belfast is not all of one orange colour, the company had Catholics as well as Protestants, and included occasionally Joseph Campbell (Seosamh mac Cathmhaoil), whose lyric poetry has earned him a considerable repute. He belongs to the period when Gaelic came with a shock of surprise to Irish writers, and his

work owes much of its charm to the skilful use of Gaelic expressions .

“ I am the gilly of Christ  
The mate of Mary's son ”

These are simply Englishing of Ulster names, whose meaning few that used them recognized: Gilchrist, MacGiolla Christ, Maclechose, MacGiolla Iosa—and so on

Campbell's work belongs to the pre-war and pre-revolution period, and it has the singing quality, it follows accepted rhythms and it can be understood. But his place is definitely with the writers who were not only Irish but, so to say, self-consciously Gaelic.

This is not true of another Ulster poet, “Richard Rowley,” whose most characteristic verse celebrates his native Belfast and the glory of its industrial life. Shipyard workers, mustering and disbanding daily by brigades, march across the long bridge to Queen's Island—“terrible as an army with banners” One may like better his *County Down Songs*, in praise of the poacher's life, or of the cherry orchard by a stream falling from the slope of Sheve Donard but the *City Songs* add to Irish literature something inspired by energies which are not memorable in the

## CHAPTER XII

### AFTER THE REVOLUTION

BEFORE considering the literature produced during and after the final stage of revolution, which brought self government to the whole of Ireland and virtually complete independence to three-fourths of it, some general observations are necessary

Shaw once observed that a man with a broken leg is unhealthily aware of his leg and that a country with a broken nationality is unhealthily preoccupied with its nationality. When a race finds itself condemned to an inferior status, and distrusted, there is a perpetual tendency towards exaggerating its claim to full right, and exaggeration in the long run breeds a bitter scepticism. To accept one of the current phrases which has some intelligible content, Ireland presents a bad case of the inferiority complex. Much of its literature tends to affirming more than can be made good, and the reaction is seen in bitter self-mockery.

Joyce's two main books, whatever else they may be, are the study of a diseased mind, and a great part of the disease is the inferiority complex, pride run mad. What is healthy in them, what gives them their power, is the fight for freedom. But Joyce's case is exceptional in Irish literature, because the freedom at stake for him is freedom from Irish fetters, self-imposed by the race. He contends for the right of the individual soul to assert itself in its own fashion. Plunges into disgustfulness are no less

Abbey playbills which were to become better known in other forms of literature—Brinsley Macnamara and Daniel Corkery. Others again show how wide a range the theatre drew from—in 1919 Desmond Fitzgerald—then directing revolutionary propaganda, and later a leading figure in Mr Cosgrave's Ministry—produced his play, *The Saint*. In 1921, at the fiercest of the war between English and Irish forces, the *Revolutionist* was given, its author, Terence MacSwiney, Lord Mayor of Cork, had staggered the world by a hunger-strike prolonged to his death after eighty days. In that year came also *Bedmates*, the first work of Mr George Shiels, a fertile dramatist.

But the theatre existed precariously in a city where curfew at nine o'clock was imposed for long periods, and the streets often echoed to musketry or bombs, and after the Free State had been established, civil war prolonged these amenities. It was not until April 1923, the month in which Mr de Valera called off the contest, that the Abbey not only regained its vogue, but began to have the experience of turning money away. Dublin took to its heart a dramatist who was originally a Dublin working man and who, in *The Shadow of the Gunman*, presented the life of Dublin tenements in the time of revolution. A year later, in March 1924, came *Juno and the Paycock*, and in the autumn following, *Nannie's Night Out*. Finally, in February 1926, *The Plough and the Stars* completed this series of dramas, all depicting the same quarters of the city, under the same high-strung and even hysterical emotions.

The formation of this new force in Irish literature should be noted. In the first place, unlike the majority of Dublin working-men, O Casey was not of Catholic parents. But he had been for years an active member of the Gaelic League, and also active in the Labour movement whose chief leader was James Connolly. That is to say, he had been trained in a socialist school. Socialist propaganda

makes arid reading, but his association with students of Gaelic added colour to his mind. For literary training, probably the Abbey Theatre was his best school, and he may well have learnt from Synge the value of a rich idiom, for the speech of his characters, without sacrificing truth to type, is often, like Synge's, highly poetical.

It is not possible here to discuss O'Casey's work in detail, but some facts stand out. First, its popularity. He changed the quality of the Abbey's audiences, which had consisted almost entirely of people with a strong interest in literature, O'Casey brought in the crowd, by his combination of broad humour with a gift for poignant situations. His were not plays that glorified revolution, when they were produced, Dublin was sick of ambushes and executions, but was fully acquainted with imminent danger of death battering at the doors of people who were neither combatants nor wanted to be. Revolutionaries come and go in his plays, hard-faced young men with revolvers in their pockets, but they are not presented as heroes: they are simply a factor in the situation. His drama concerns itself with the lives of those before whom this fierce game is played, and who are always liable to become unwillingly involved. Neither is it a flattering picture of Dublin that he offers: it would be hardly too much to say that his plays are about worthless men and brave women. The convictions that show through his work are those of a pacifist, the savage inhumanity of revolutionary methods revolts him, while futile displays of old-fashioned public-house patriotism disgust. The Dublin that he shows differs only from Joyce's in that its characters are a grade lower in the social scale, they haunt the public not the private bar, they borrow to drink porter instead of whiskey. Their function in life is to spend the money that their wifes earn by charring. But the women are valiant: the little typist girl in his first play runs off with

the bag of bombs, which the poet and the pedlar have discovered, to their consternation, left in the room they share, when the alarm is given that the Black and Tans are coming. "Juno," in the second play, has no such gesture to make, but she is the mother keeping her home together by her earnings, and keeping up its gaiety as well, she has no wish that her boy should go out with the Republican army, he has suffered enough in that already, but it is she who has to try and soothe his terrors, and it is she to whom he is brought home, shot for an informer.

Dublin, to do it justice, knew at once the merit of this play. But in London, where it had no familiar emotions to appeal to, the recognition was even more decisive, and Miss Allgood as Juno divided the honours with the dramatist. Yet, as a whole, the Dublin production was possibly of the two the finer, even though it lacked her genius, the company was more completely in tune; and certainly, in the climax, when, after the tragedy is over, Juno's worthless "Paycock" of a husband and the mean sot who sponges on him exchange their drunken reflections, laughter was not dragged out so long that it drowned the savage irony—as happened in London.

Yet Dublin made no protest against this portrayal of Dublin life. But in the fourth and most ambitious of the plays, whose scene is placed in Easter week, O'Casey found himself denounced. Pearce is introduced, not directly on the stage, but his voice is heard from outside a window, speaking actual words from the address in which he proclaimed the Republic, and the window is the window of a public house in which members of the Volunteer force are seen. This was resented as a misrepresentation, since, in fact, a rule of abstinence was imposed on the Volunteer force—and contributed very greatly to their success, while the introduction in a stage-play of words regarded by Republicans as scriptures was regarded as a profanation.

In his next play, *The Silver Tassie*, O'Casey broke new ground, making his drama concern the lives of soldiers back from the European War. Owing to a quarrel, which received undue publicity, it was not produced at the Abbey, and in London was played by English actors, with two or three of the Irish school thrown in. Lack of harmony between the two types of acting emphasized the inharmonious construction of the play, which plunged from realism to fantasy and back again. The most impressive part of it was the second act, a vision of trench life generated in O'Casey's imagination by talk from returned soldiers. After this, having moved to London, he found his next subject in the scene which most strikes every foreigner—Hyde Park, with its strange medley of orators and audiences. In this play as in all, there were many lines of great beauty, and moving thoughts. But so far it remains true that O'Casey has never succeeded completely except with a play of Dublin life, when that life was penetrated with the ferment of revolutionary action and suffering.

In his two later plays this dramatist departed from the traditional lines of playwriting, according to which the action is built up by the interaction of a limited group of characters. The second act of *The Silver Tassie* was a sort of choric interlude—rather a spectacular illustration of war scenes than a presentment of action carrying on the main plot. *Within the Gates* was a succession of such scenes rather than the evolution of an ordered drama. The same tendency shows itself in the work of other Irish playwrights, among whom Mr Denis Johnston stands out. His *Moon on the Yellow River*, a play whose success in London was even more marked than in Dublin, lacks coherence from the traditional standpoint. Yet it is in fact a study of the incoherence resulting from a period of revolution in which, or after which, society has not yet become stabilized. The temperamental revolutionary, whose ideals urge him to go



on destroying that a better order may emerge from the ruins is shown in contact with those whom his doctrines and personality attract, and with those whom they shock or confuse—and finally in conflict with a revolutionary colleague of the earlier phase. This formidable personage, having upset one government by free use of the revolver, is now determined to establish the new one by the same method. Mr Johnston's likings do not seem to incline towards any established order—indeed all the younger men of the group to which he belongs have preference for eloquent ideals over complete achievements. But what matters is the picture that he gives of a revolution's aftermath, seen from various angles of vision, including that of a German engineer—brought in by the new order to establish a power-house, which, because it is an achievement of the less than ideal state has to be blown up.

*The Moon on the Yellow River* was an Abbey production, but Mr Johnston's first play, *The Old Lady Says No*, was presented by a more recent dramatic enterprise, which has provided Dublin with a second stage of its own. The "Gate Theatre" Company, after only seven years of existence, have become serious competitors to the Abbey. Two actors, both trained in England, have been its vivifying nucleus. Mr Hilton Edwards is English but Mr Michael MacLiammore is not only Irish but an Aran islander and therefore Irish speaking—an accomplishment of special service, as this company more than once produced plays in Gaelic. Its reason for existence however, has been, that sufficient interest in drama generally has been roused in Dublin to create a demand for plays which are not produced by the ordinary commercial theatre. It was felt that the Abbey offered little but plays of peasant life and to some extent, the purely poetic work of Yeats. "The Gate's" first mission seemed to be to present versions of work by such authors as Pirandello. But Lord Longford

himself a playwright, who gave the theatre indispensable support, encouraged also production of work by Irish writers whose work might not commend itself to the Abbey. *The Old Lady Says No* was an early and successful instance. Nowadays, after thirty years of existence under the same directorate, the Abbey comes to be regarded as a trifle conservative and old-fashioned; and since the Free State came into being, it has the stamp or stigma of respectability conferred by a government grant. The sum granted (£900 a year) would not pay a week's expenses of a leading London theatre, but it is an innovation in the English-speaking world, and a signal proof how far the movement to create a national Irish literature has won public opinion and feeling in Ireland to its side. It has served also, indirectly, to show that the principle of artistic freedom is jealously guarded; for when an American tour for the Abbey Company was projected in 1934-5, Mr de Valera's government hinted at some desire to control the selection of plays to be produced, and immediately Yeats published a refusal to allow any such interference, even though withdrawal of the grant should be the consequence.

None the less, a younger generation tends to regard the unsubsidized theatre as the less stereotyped, and the "Gate" has experimented boldly—not least boldly and successfully in Shakespearian productions. But, for a consideration of Irish dramatic literature, it is more important to note Lord Longford's play, *Yahoo*, which dramatizes the story of Jonathan Swift, in part by traditional construction of action and dialogue, but, in the close, by a symbolical choric dance of spectres round the lonely, half-maddened man, in whose ears the drumming noise beats and roars.

Irish writers, as the modern literary movement developed, have been drawn more and more to the sinister figure who stands at the beginning of modern Irish nationalism and nationalist literature. Over and above several

biographies by Irish hands, a play on the *Drapier Letters*, by Arthur Power, was produced at the Abbey in 1927, since then Lord Longford's play at the "Gate" has been matched at the Abbey by *Words on the Windowpane*, in which Yeats with singular skill evoked on the stage the voice and personality of Swift—uttered through a medium—in a room haunted by Stella's presence because on its window were written with a diamond her lines to Swift. The actress, Miss Mary Craig, brought out with great skill the contrast between a commonplace, somewhat vulgar Irish-woman and the sinister tortured spirit that used her voice to tell his story, part in dialogue with Vanessa and then with Stella, but, above all, in his final utterance "Perish the day on which I was born."

It is a far cry indeed from that piece of stark prose dialogue—the most dramatically effective thing that Yeats has written in his later period—to the wistful beauty of his first play, *The Land of Heart's Desire*, which was revived in December 1935, forty-one years after its first performance, to make part of the triple bill for a special occasion. Dr Larchet was retiring from control of the orchestra which he had led for eight-and-twenty years, and this performance was in his honour. It began with *The Rising of the Moon*, most popular of all Lady Gregory's comedies, and curious it was to note how closely tradition was maintained. Mr M. J. Dolan as the rebel escaped from jail and disguised as a ballad-singer, reproduced one by one the gestures and movements of W. G. Fay, and yet made a fresh creation, not less alive than Fay's, and he had this advantage that it came easier for him to sing the song about "poor ould Granuaile," which beguiles the police sergeant into admitting the rebel sympathies of his youth. Mr McCormick was a sergeant more refined and introspective than Arthur Sinclair's original heavy, bucolic pillar of "The Force", he was good in a different way, true to a different

type—but not less good, though completely different, in identically the same business. In the *Land of Heart's Desire* Mr. Dolan, as a cowed and brown-robed priest, looked like a Durer picture, he was seen to more advantage than his more celebrated fellows in the cast, Mr. McCormick and Mr. Barry Fitzgerald. But the Abbey has never in its history had better actors than these three.

The play, to be frank, reads better than it plays; Miss Sheelah Richards, as the Fairy, had the best of it. But a few days earlier Miss Eileen Crowe (the young bride) had been playing the mother in *Maurice Harte*, and, to one who remembered Sara Allgood in that same part, she seemed to give a performance not less complete and not less moving. It would be hard to say more for any actress.

The last play on the bill was *Meadowsweet*, by Seumas O'Kelly, humour of country life enriched with that command of picturesque idiom which is seen in his *Weaver's Grave*. Here Mr. Arthur Shields, associated to thousands of memories with Lennox Robinson's *Whiteheaded Boy*, was once more a good-looking young countryman with a quick twist to his tongue. But when Miss Maureen Delany, as the servant girl on whom his affections were set, opened a window in the farmhouse and cocked a roving eye, that one glance sent a stab of delight through the whole house. Her personality seized in an instant that assembly of her friends, and seized it for laughter. Yet Maureen Delany was Juno in O'Casey's play, and Juno is a tragic part.

When Lennox Robinson, who since 1922 had been a joint director of the theatre and generally the producer of its plays, tendered the theatre's expression of goodwill to the musician who for the last time had conducted its orchestra, Dr. Larchet in replying said that in his recollection the theatre had always been on the brink of a crisis, and always threatened to collapse; but yet it had always renewed its youth. What has been written here is to convey

assent to Dr. Larchet's judgment that the company had never been better than on that night—As to dramatists, it would seem that two theatres can now be provided with plays from Irish sources, whereas thirty-five years ago one had difficulty in finding the material for a very small repertory

The same increasing productiveness is to be found in all branches of literature, especially since the European War and our own later military activities. All this output is so near (and much of it, to a critic of my generation, so strange) that it will be best to finish this chapter by a review of the institution in which the results have been classified on Irish authority, for literature is so far established that we have an Irish Academy of Letters, founded in 1932

It is probable that its establishment was promoted by a defensive instinct. Irish literature was meant to be a free expression of the Irish mind, yet this expression had been threatened by a mob censorship, directed first against Synge's plays and then against O'Casey's *Plough and the Stars*, indeed, when the *Silver Tassie* was produced in Dublin, further trouble developed. Moreover, with the advent of an Irish government the mob censorship was supplemented by one of official creation. A Board of Censors was instituted by Mr. Cosgrave's government, to which any member of the public might complain of a book as being dangerous to morals; whereupon the Board must consider and report, and, if their report was adverse, circulation of the work in Ireland was prohibited. The main purpose was to guard the press of Ireland from foreign contamination, and only a few of the works prohibited were by Irish authors. They included, however, Mr. Shaw's *Black Girl*.

The project of the Academy was sponsored by two Irishmen—Shaw and Yeats. These two seniors put for-

ward on their own authority the list of twenty-five original members, which will be found in an Appendix ; adding to it ten " Associates," whose work was considered less creative (that is to say, not producing either poetry, novels, or plays), or less Irish. Yeats, introducing the project to the public at a meeting, made it clear that the intention was to have a body of literary men whose joint opinion would carry weight even against other authorities.

It will be seen that the list as constituted has notable omissions. Katherine Tynan died a short time before it was drawn up, others refused the invitation to membership. But the muster remains imposing.

Among the poets of whom I have not already written at some length, Seumas O'Sullivan belongs to the earlier brood fostered by A. E. His contribution to Irish literature has been augmented by his editorship of the *Dublin Magazine*, a quarterly which always bears the marks of a skilled interest in literature. Oliver Gogarty is of the same generation, as is testified by many references to him in George Moore's *Hail and Farewell*, and also by the presentation of him under another name in *Ulysses*, but the books of verse to which he owes his membership appeared after the Civil War. These are *An Offering of Swans* and *Wild Apples*. A single verse may be quoted from the earlier of these books.

" Then do not murmur at the knife  
That death's indifferent hand drives home,  
But with the strivers leave the strife  
Nor, after Cæsar, skulk in Rome."

Any judge of English verse at any time, or for the last three hundred years, would have recognized this as high poetry, yet not specially marked with the impress of any period. Elsewhere, as Mr. Yeats in his Foreword observes,

Senator Gogarty (for he was a senator while there were senators) reminds us of Fletcher and the early seventeenth century. It would be difficult to pick out any trace of the Irish literary movement in his verse, yet this poet has lived in the centre of it, and could not imaginably have been anything but an Irishman.

On the other hand, Mr Austin Clarke and Mr F R Higgins are definitely products of the movement. Mr Clarke who began in 1918, chose his first subject from Gaelic mythology. *The Vengeance of Finn* tells again the end of Diarmuid's love-story with Grania, and later (1921) *The Sword of the West* passing from Ossianic legend, handles the earlier cycle of Ulster and its war with Connaught. An intervening book *The Fires of Baal* drew on Hebrew sources, and showed a close study of Milton's verse. But in the main Mr Clarke seems derivative from Yeats, and Gaelic rather by the matter of his work than by the spirit of it. A new and fresher voice comes in with Mr F R Higgins, whose whole thought and expression seem to be coloured by Gaelic as if it were to him a living language, habitually used. Sometimes, indeed, he writes with deliberate suggestion of the ballads written by Irish schoolmasters who were just beginning to write in English, though to the quality of their "come-all-ye's," he adds a very different quality.

"Where the sea flows over the full fresh water  
My love I saw under still boughs,  
And swimming my boat on that tidal river,  
I took my moorings by her greenhouse

There were many ladies along the Claddagh  
Taking air by each garden tree—  
All taking air in that early evening  
And none so quiet as my lady

I slipped beside her most entertaining—  
 Making fine talk on that rounded sea ;  
 But O, she said, ' You, I cannot marry,  
 For a Spanish man said bravely to me :

' O, be my lady and in Limerick laces  
 Your delicate ways shall airily pass  
 With quiet feet in your blue pampooties  
 And guinea-hens on the daisy grass.' "

Sometimes, again, his aim is to suggest through English such a poem as one of the seventeenth century poets, who preserved the tradition of their bardic schools, might have written in Irish .

### THE GRIEF

" It is my fill of sorrow among the black glens  
 That stript of light I grope as though gone blind ;  
 Ah, Muiris, you are the grief, that wandered my voice  
 And left me with this broken mind

" You walked the blue mountains in an air of stars,  
 While the cuckoos barked before you to dawn-rise ;  
 But, Muiris O'Ruane, I have taken my death  
 In the love you gave me then with dark lies "

Either of these, it will be agreed, has charm , yet in each the poet relies for his effect on the use of an artificial idiom. But here is the natural utterance of Mr Higgins in a powerful piece of evocation , and it will be noted that though rhyme is very sparing, his verse is bound together, Gaelic-wise, by internal assonance of the broad vowels, and by alliteration of consonants carried all through :



“ With these bawneen men I’m one  
In the grey dusk-fall,  
Watching the Galway land  
Sink down in distress—  
With dark men, talking of gras,  
By a loose stone wall,  
In murmurs drifting and drifting  
To loneliness ”

The novelists make a more numerous group Brinsley Macnamara, Liam O’Flaherty, Frank O’Connor, Peadar O’Donnell, Sean O’Faoláin, and Francis Stuart Macnamara has been playwright and actor as well as novelist, he was of the Abbey company for a period, and some of his plays have been successful, but he first became noted for a somewhat unpleasant study of Irish life in the Midlands, called *The Valley of the Squinting Windows* Resentment against an overbearing priesthood figures repeatedly in the work of this author When he studies effects of the revolution it is with a note of disillusionment—Mr O’Flaherty has made a speciality of brutal force, his story, *The Informer*, was admired in and out of Ireland, it traces some four-and-twenty hours in the life of a human gorilla who—improbably enough—kills the gunman, his close comrade, and then lacks brain enough to profit by his treachery Like O’Casey or Macnamara, O’Flaherty looks at revolutionary Ireland from the outside, as a journalist might do The other men—O’Connor O’Donnell, O’Faolain, and Stuart—write of revolution as a struggle to which their sympathies are entirely committed, and of which, at all events, the first three had active experience O’Connor’s *Guests of the Nation* and O’Faoláin’s *Midsummer Madness* depict scenes in the struggle against the English forces (soldiers and police), and the later and more bitter struggle against the forces of a Free State Government

Their scenes are mostly laid in the south. Peadar O'Donnell is the novelist of a special district, the bleak and poverty-stricken north-west corner of Donegal, from which young men and young women go out to work during the summer to farms in Scotland and in the more prosperous "Lagan-side" of Donegal, where Protestants have held what they acquired in the confiscation under James I. Francis Stuart, of a wholly different upbringing, writes with the same skill, but in a manner more affected by modern examples; in short, he is much less easily intelligible, though his prose, the prose of a poet, often has beauty that the others do not reach, or reach after.

O'Connor's book of short studies was followed by a novel, *The Saint and Mary Kate*, in which the revolutionary interest merely supplies the background for the strange figure of a "voteen"—as Irish people call the man or woman who exaggerates piety—and perhaps this is the best novel come out of this group; for Peadar O'Donnell's books, *The Islanders*, *Adrigooli*, and others, in spite of the tenderness and fidelity with which they render peasant life, lose balance once the political note is touched.

An elder Academician, Lord Dunsany, published recently a full-length novel, *The Curse of the Wise Woman*, which could hardly be overpraised for the beauty with which it renders the landscape of the great central bog lying up against Meath pastures, and the descriptions of wild goose and woodcock shooting in it rival what it also holds—one of the best fox-hunting chapters ever written.

But if the achievements of Irish writers in prose fiction are to be reckoned, it would be wrong to regard the Academy's choices as sufficient representation. Miss Kate O'Brien, in *Without My Cloak*, has written a novel which has a richness of life, and in certain passages a beauty, that I do not find equalled among the younger Academicians.

It has also, what they do not give, a study of normal Irish conditions, drawn from the existence of the richer Catholic merchants and their families. Perhaps in manning the Academy, too much importance has been given to novels and plays of revolutionary times, and Miss O'Brien is just as Irish in every sense as Peadar O'Donnell.

Irish also, though, if the word be insisted on, Anglo-Irish, is Elizabeth Bowen, whose brilliant and growing talent is perhaps strongest in sheer literary accomplishment. One of her books, *The Last September*, is a study of Ireland in the revolution period (studied again if you will from the Anglo-Irish point of view, but certainly not aloofly), and several of her short stories—the form of fiction in which her work has been so far most completely satisfying—have Irish households and houses for their themes. Finally, Margaret Kennedy—whose book, *The Constant Nymph*, admittedly stands out among the fiction of the post-war years—is as Irish or Anglo-Irish, as parentage can make her. The scene of one of her novels is laid in Donegal, though this does not greatly signify. But if the Academy, very naturally, chose to claim T. E. Lawrence by enrolling him among its associates, it had at least as much right to do the same with Margaret Kennedy. L. A. G. Strong, also an associate, has two countries with a strong attachment to each, but Irish readers will prefer to his studies of Devon what he wrote in *The Garden* and *The Sea Wall* reviving a childhood and boyhood passed in the lovely landscape from Dunleavy and Killiney to the Wicklow hills.

General and critical literature among the Associates is represented by John Eglinton, by J. M. Hone, author of a good book on Berkeley, and by Professor Starkie, whose wandering experiences in Hungary and Spain have delighted readers. Mr. Ernest Boyd treated the same subject as this book handles at a much earlier period. Shane Leslie's work in prose and verse is for the most part Irish.

in subject as well as in temperament Miss Helen Waddell is out of place among the Associates. If creative work is to be the qualification of membership, her novel, *Peter Avelard*, would fill it, but a stronger claim could be rested on her extraordinary genius for translation—fully equal, though different in kind, to that of Stephen McKenna (the translator of Plotinus), but above all because, in bringing the mind of “the Dark Ages” present to modern readers, she has shown us Irish scholars pervading Europe and made us hear their songs.

A name surprisingly absent from the list is that of Monk Gibbon, in his own phrase, “a dispossessed poet.”

“I am from Ireland,  
The sad country—  
I have lost her ways,  
Her thought, her murmur;  
I have lost all  
But my love for her”

Dispossessed or not, an authentic poet, author also of *The Seals*, a book about West Donegal, fit to put beside Synge's on the Aran Islands.

Professor Corkery—who was one of those originally named as an Academician, but who refused to accept membership of a body, by his standards, so doubtfully “Irish”—would not approve of including Mr Monk Gibbon, in whose verse there is no allusion to Gaelic lore, who is indeed Irish simply by the fact of birth and that other fact, of love for Ireland. His native language indeed is English, but so is Professor Corkery's. It is in English that Professor Corkery has written a series of very admirable tales of the southern countryfolk, free from the bitter touch of disillusionment so common in the younger writers—though he writes at the same time and mostly

of the same period. In English also, he has written that book, *The Hidden Ireland*, to which allusion has been already made, and which has probably been a guide, for instance, to Mr Higgins in his research into Gaelic poetry. In English again, he has written a book on Synge, which challenges the right of any writer to call himself Irish who does not conform to Professor Corkery's definition, and he allows that it almost excludes Synge.

We all grow a little tired of this exclusiveness. What is Irish? Who is an Irishman? Neither Dublin, Wexford, Waterford, Cork, Limerick, nor Galway was ever completely Gaelic or completely Gaelic-speaking, and they are assuredly Irish towns. Let us praise the authorities of the Academy because they have drawn their definitions in a generally inclusive spirit. They have as yet no writer whose main expression has been in Irish—though perhaps Hyde's verse in Gaelic is better than in English. One of the prizes which the Academy has been endowed with means to offer was awarded to Muiris O'Sullivan for his book, *Fice Bliadna ag fás* (Twenty Years A-Growing). And most certainly, had Father Peter O'Leary been alive, his name would have been included among Academicians, perhaps rather for the sap and vigour of his style than for "creative" quality. Had Padraic Conroy been alive, the Connemara man, who died young—a fresh incarnation of the impecunious poets who roved Ireland in the eighteenth century—he surely would have deserved his place alongside Peadar O'Donnell for the sake of stories which are available in an English version, *Field and Fair*.

Yet here again is the difficulty. Should an Academy co-opt members whose writings they cannot read? Of the present body not half a dozen could pronounce whether, in a work submitted in Irish, the Irish is good or bad. In another twenty years a certain proportion of those who have learnt Irish to qualify for jobs may have developed a

feeling for it as a literary language. But for the present, and for any future that we can foresee, the mind of Ireland will express itself in English; and we shall be none the less Irish for that. If we make a distinctive literature of our own, we shall be as Irish as the Scots are Scottish; and we may then, instead of yielding to an inferiority complex, feel ourselves, as the Scots feel themselves, to be ahead of the rest of the world rather than behind it.

For the moment we can make a fair showing. Within the past fifty years we have produced eight outstanding names. Shaw and Yeats have each received the Nobel prize. George Moore, in some estimates, would be put on a level with either of them, in some estimates Joyce would be put above any of these. A. E. Synge, James Stephens, and O'Casey are all recognized, even more clearly out of Ireland than in Ireland, as writers of genius, and of singularly original genius.

But when all is said, the movement as a movement sums itself up in the career of Yeats. Without Yeats it is hardly probable that either Shaw or George Moore would have been attracted, so far even as they were attracted, back into the narrow orbit of Ireland. Yeats has found help and alliance always, but they were richly earned by a man whom no mercenary consideration, nor desire for popularity, ever turned aside from the austere pursuit of his art. With that pursuit has always been linked the wider purpose of stimulating the intellect of his country to noble artistic expression. His own personal work, now extended over more than fifty years, has shown a constant natural growth till what was a sapling in the soft flush of young greenness stands hardened by long resistance to all weather, yet shapely, vigorous, and fertile as in its prime. But metaphor serves ill here. It has not been compatible with the scope of this book to follow out the succeeding phases of this

poet's work, and no mention at all has been made of what Mr Strong in a fine passage has called Yeats's "hieratic prose"—stately and severe, yet, like his verse, tending always to a finer simplicity, increasingly supplied to all uses. But it is necessary to note the change that he himself characterized in one of his short poems, though whether he discarded his early symbolic method, as his verse says, because too many copied that outer garment of his thought, may be doubted. More probably an inner impulse led him to hold that "there is more enterprise in walking naked." At all events, since the change came, the country in which, with which, and for which he worked has had the direct, frank, and often even arrogant expression of his powerful mind given unmistakably, alike in prose and in verse.

Ireland owes more to this power, this frankness, and even to this arrogance, than Ireland as a whole is now likely to realize, but she owes most of all to the instinct for service which made this natural solitary and esoteric the centre of a hive. In Russell he found an ally from the first, in Synge an ally, and one whom, as has been told, he had to defend, and in defending gave high example of comradeship. Lady Gregory was more than an ally, for she helped one *not easily accessible for simple folk to an easier utterance*. O'Casey owes to Yeats the theatre on which his rough genius found its appropriate platform, and even Joyce—as one may read between the lines of his books—was grateful, in his difficult and morbid youth for a beauty not alien to that mind which resented the alien vehicle inseparable from its native expression. And each and all of the younger writers, from James Stephens down, owed and owe to this powerful forerunner that candid consideration for their work which, before Yeats began was refused almost automatically to any work that proclaimed itself as Irish.

In short, the achievement of Yeats has been double. He set out to be a poet and he has proved himself a great

poet. But he set out also to create in Ireland a literature which should transcend that mediocrity to which the Irish mind, expressing itself in English, seemed to be condemned, and to-day, by general admission, such a literature is there, increasing and multiplying.

It is on my conscience that in this survey I have done less than justice to the man who ranked beside Yeats, rather than next to him, as an influence. Much of A.E.'s influence, though perhaps not the greatest part, was exerted through writing that could not last—though the impetus given was of a kind not to be soon exhausted. I may be wrong in thinking that even A.E.'s poetry, his writing that was not ephemeral in character, will not be remembered and read, except in chosen pieces—Again, to pass to another figure, it may be that I am wrong in rating the imaginative work of George Moore much less high than it is placed by the majority of English critics. So, for a double reason, I give here the words written by A.E. to be spoken when George Moore's ashes were scattered on an island in the lake by whose shores he grew up in County Mayo. They give some guidance to an estimate of Moore, for they were written by one who loved Moore's mind; they reveal also, even more surely, the wise and generous spirit out of which they were uttered.

"It would be unseemly that the ashes of George Moore should be interred here and the ritual of any orthodoxy spoken over him; but I think he who exercised so fantastic an imagination in his life would have been pleased at the fantasy which led his family and friends to give him an urn burial in this lake island, which was familiar to him from childhood. Whatever may be the fate of his spirit, it cannot be the fate of the Laodicean, he who was always hot or cold. There could be no fitting burial for one who



always acted from his own will and his own centre in cemeteries where the faithful to convention lie side by side

However he warred on the ideals of his nation he knew it was his Irish ancestry gave him the faculties which made him one of the most talented and unfilial of Ireland's children. His ironic spirit would have been pleased at this urn burial in this lonely lake island, so that he might be to Ireland in death what he had been in life, remote and defiant of its faiths and movements. He loved the land even if he did not love the nation. Yet his enmities even made his nation to be as admired and loved as the praise of its patriots. He had the speech of the artist which men remember while they forget the indiscriminating voices which had nothing but love. If his ashes have any sentience they will feel at home here, for the colours of Carra Lake remained in his memory when many of his other affections had passed. It is possible the artist's love of earth, rock, water, and sky is an act of worship. It is possible that faithfulness to art is an acceptable service. That worship, that service, were his. If any would condemn him for creed of theirs he had assailed, let them be certain first that they laboured for their ideals as faithfully as he did for his."

How the work of Yeats, of A E, and of his other allies and comrades, has helped and been helped by the movement for revival of Gaelic, how the two have interlocked, will, I hope, be apparent to whoever reads this book. Both movements have been profoundly affected, as was inevitable, by the political revolution that developed concurrently with them. But there is this difference to note: the attempt to bring back Gaelic into common use has behind it all the resources of the Irish State, used without stint of money,

and even with disregard for the need of wider and more effective education. It may seem to some enthusiasts that the other attempt to create an Irish literature in English runs counter to that Gaelic ideal which the State patronizes. So much as this at least is certain, that the literary revival has advanced without help, and not without hindrance, from political forces. Its aim is freedom, to liberate the mind of Ireland from old catchwords and obsessions, to inspire into it a healthy pride. Thought is more important than the vehicle of thought, and an Ireland spiritually free and healthy is more to be sought after than an Ireland Gaelic-speaking.

flows, but then are they all fully informed about Hippocrene? It would be rash also to say that Mr Lyle Donaghy or the poets of his flight are generally intelligible—but the younger poets to-day, in all literatures known to me do not trouble about that, and the Irishmen can plead precedent from the bardic schools, which kept the *profanum vulgus* at arm's length much more fiercely than Horace ever did. What matters for my purpose is that Mr Lyle Donaghy's book of poems, *Into this Light*, is typical because in it an Irish poet, of Anglo-Irish origin, is writing definitely for an Irish audience, and assuming in his poems that his readers will understand allusions to remote Irish history and to all Ireland's mythological lore.

How far such assumption is justified may be—as I have hinted—questioned. But it is, I hold, beyond doubt or question that, since the mind of Irish men of letters has been directed to the past no less than to the present of their country's life, since they have been aware of the gathered store transmitted from Ireland's past—store in legend, store in history, store in creative imagination—the literature of our times has been singularly enriched—and we can point with warranted pride to work done in our time by Irish writers, in the old Irish phrase, “for the glory of God and the honour of Ireland.”

## APPENDIX

THE Irish Academy of Letters was publicly launched at a meeting held in the Peacock Theatre (attached to the Abbey) on September 18, 1932. Lennox Robinson, who presided, read out the letter which had been addressed to each of those invited to become "founder members."

"DEAR SIR,

"We have at present in Ireland no organization representing *Belles Lettres*, and consequently no means whereby we Irish authors can make known our views, nor any instrument by which action can be taken on our behalf.

"There is in Ireland an official censorship possessing, and actively exercising, powers of suppression which may at any moment confine an Irish author to the British and American market, and thereby make it impossible for him to live by distinctive Irish literature.

"As our votes are counted by dozens instead of thousands, and are therefore negligible, and as no election can ever turn on our grievances, our sole defence lies in the authority of our utterance. This, at least, is by no means negligible, for in Ireland there is still a deep respect for intellectual and poetic quality. In so far as we represent that quality, we can count on a consideration beyond all proportion to our numbers but we cannot exercise our influence unless we have an organ through which we can address the public, or appeal collectively and unanimously to the Government.

"We must therefore found an Academy of *Belles Lettres*. Will you give us your name as one of the founder members."

"In making this claim upon you we have no authority or mandate beyond the fact that the initiative has to be taken by somebody, and our age and the publicity which attaches to our names makes it easier for us than for younger writers

"Please send your reply to the Provisional Hon Secretary, George Russell, Esq, 17, Rathgar avenue, Dublin—Yours faithfully

"GEORGE BERNARD SHAW,  
"W B YEATS"

The list originally proposed was then read out :

#### ACADEMICIANS

Austin Clarke	Seán O'Faolain
Padraic Colum.	Peadar O'Donnell
Daniel Corkery.	Liam O'Flaherty
St J Ervine	Seumas O'Sullivan
Oliver St J Gogarty	Forest Reid
F R Higgins	Lennox Robinson
Douglas Hyde	George R Russell
James Joyce	G B Shaw
Brinsley Macnamara	Miss E CE Somerville.
George Moore	James Stephens
T C Murray	Francis Stuart
Scán O'Casey	W B Yeats.
Frank O'Connor	

#### ASSOCIATES

Lord Dunsany.	Eugene O'Neill
John Eglinton	Aircraftsman T E Shaw
Stephen Gwynn	( 'Lawrence of Arabia ' )
J M Hone	Walter Starkie
Stephen McKenna (the translator of Plotinus)	L. A G Strong
	Miss Helen Waddell

The active list on January 1936 was as follows :

## ACADEMICIANS

Austin Clarke  
Padraic Colum.  
Lord Dunsany  
St John Ervine  
Oliver Gogarty.  
F. R. Higgins  
Brinsley Macnamara.  
Alice Milligan.  
T. C. Murray.  
Frank O'Connor.  
Peadar O'Donnell.  
Seán O'Faoláin.  
Liam O'Flaherty.  
Seumas O'Sullivan.  
Forrest Reid  
Lennox Robinson.  
G Bernard Shaw.  
E CE Somerville.  
Francis Stuart.  
James Stephens  
W B. Yeats

## ASSOCIATES

E. A. Boyd  
John Eglinton  
Stephen Gwynn.  
Shane Leslie.  
Eugene O'Neill.  
Walter Starkie.  
L. A G Strong.  
Helen Waddeil.

The number of Academicians being fixed at twenty-five, and of Associates at ten, it will be seen that there are four vacancies among the former and one among the latter

The original list included among the Academicians George Moore and George Russell, who have since died Shan Bullock, elected in place of George Moore, is also dead Miss Alice Milligan, poetess and playwright, was

later added to the members, and Lord Dunsany at first among the Associates, became an Academician. James Joyce, one of the original list, ignored the invitation, Seán O'Casey publicly refused it with violence, preferring splendid isolation, while Douglas Hyde and Daniel Corkery held that an Irish Academy should consist of writers in Irish.

Stephen McKenna, the translator of Plotinus, was among the first Associates named but declined the invitation 'out of modesty,' though supporting the institution. T. E. Lawrence, one of the original Associates, is since dead. E. A. Boyd and Shane Leslie filled the vacancies created by Lord Dunsany's promotion and McKenna's refusal.

In the printed Rules of the Academy, the Academy's special object is defined as "the promotion of creative literature in Ireland."

The rules lay down that "Academicians shall be selected because of creative work which seems to the inviting or electing body both important and Irish in character or subject. The Academy shall have power to elect honorary members, called Associates whose work does not fall completely within this definition. They shall not be more than ten in number and they must be of Irish birth or descent."

It is under contemplation that the distinction between Members and Associates shall be abolished.

A curious rule decides that no candidate shall be eligible if his, or her, election would raise the average age of the whole body above sixty years. It follows that future selections must be only made from the young.

As a result of financial support from friends the Academy is enabled to offer a variety of honours.

(1) The Gregory Medal (Premier Award of the

Academy) in recognition of an Irish author's distinguished services to literature in general. This award is only made every three years · the first to receive the medal were A.E., G. B. Shaw, and W. B. Yeats

(2) The Harmsworth Award of £100 for the best work of imaginative prose published each year by an Irish author. Lord Dunsany received the 1933 Award for his novel, *The Curse of the Wise Woman* ; and the 1934 Award has been given to Joseph O'Neill for his novel, *Wind from the North*. Members of the Academy over forty years of age are, by a recent rule, not eligible

(3) The Casement Award of £50 for the best book of verse or the best play published each year. Brinsley MacNamara received the 1933 Award for his play, *Margaret Gillan* , and that of 1934 went to F. R. Higgins for his book of verse, *Arable Holdings*

(4) The O'Growney Award of £50 for the best work of imagination published in Gaelic. The 1933 Award went to Maurice O'Sullivan for his *Twenty Years A-Growing*.



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